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Relationships as Communicative Acts in Youth Ministry and Trinitarian Theology

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**Relationships as Communicative Acts
in Youth Ministry
and Trinitarian Theology**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Theology
and Ministry

King's College London

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the lived experience of youth ministry practitioners in their mission amongst non-churched young people. It explores relationships as communicative acts through narratives of practice, as voiced by the youth ministry practitioners, through the voice of the literature on youth ministry as missionary endeavour and within the voice of Trinitarian theology.

To do this, a methodology of practical theology is developed and employed. This is negotiated through conducting the research within a theological hermeneutic and by placing qualitative research within an appropriate cycle of reflection. To explore the lived practice of youth ministry, the interview is adopted. The interpretation of this data creates narratives of practice. The data is brought into a critical discussion with key literature on youth ministry. In relation to practice and the youth ministry literature, Trinitarian theology operates as a normative voice. Through this process, Trinitarian theology serves, illuminates and enriches practice and helps to understand enacted youth ministry as a more authentic and faithful expression of the Gospel.

Relationships are affirmed as an overarching theme expressed by the practitioners. These function as communicative acts as a place of connection and transmission and are the threads that run through the narratives of practice. Relationships as communicative acts are circuits of influence and the place of sub-cultural engagement. However, this complex and nuanced practice is summed up through the terms of relationship, like Jesus, being there and time and journey; this is seen as theological shorthand. The theological shorthand reveals an embedded theology that evokes and has a connection with the wider theological picture of the Christian tradition, yet, this wider tradition is not overtly expressed. Furthermore, the classic elements of the church's practices of *diakonia*, *kerygma* and *marturia* are collapsed into relationships. This turns relationships as communicative acts into a contemporary practice, but this is not intentional.

Therefore, a more explicit and theological re-imagining of relationships as communicative acts is advanced through Trinitarian theology; here, relationships are reframed and located in God's authorship and divine communicative action.

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Michaelmas, 2013

INTRODUCTION

Background

Questions came in quick succession: ‘So how do you communicate your faith?’, ‘How are you involved in mission amongst these young people?’ Stumbling over my words and grasping after some attempt at theological expression, ‘incarnationally’ and ‘through relationships’ I replied hesitantly. This seemed to be enough to answer the questions from a well-meaning member of the congregation. I would now call this theological shorthand. This theological expression did not seem to fully articulate the nuances and complexities of my practice among young people, yet it evoked and had a connection with the deeper Christian Tradition in which my practice took place. Since 1995 I have worked amongst young people on the fringes and margins of church life, as I sought to communicate the reality of Jesus amongst them. As a volunteer and then a full time youth minister,¹ working out of a church context, this practice was tempered with highs and lows, closeness and distance. These relationships felt like communicative orbits. Sometimes the relationships would be ones of encounter and connection, then, through a myriad of circumstances, young people would begin drifting away, become distant. Yet, in the following months, or in some cases years, a chance encounter would re-establish and re-connect the relationship. It was through these rich encounters with young people that I began to question my own theological understanding of practice. How did I communicate and enact my faith? How did these relationships function? Moreover, if the weakness of my own understanding of practice was limited, then this may point to a wider limitation amongst my fellow youth ministers and beyond into the related field of youth ministry.² Being intrigued about relationships, enacted mission and the complexities of situations and practice is the starting point for this research.³ My experience led me to question how youth ministers worked amongst young people; how did they communicate and enact mission? Therefore, the starting point for this study derives from my experience of professional practice with a desire to

¹ The terms youth work and youth ministry are debated, sometimes used interchangeable (Ward 1997), they can be seen as an unnecessary ‘dualism’, Brierley (2003). However, it is Thomson (2007, p.224-225) who offers the most robust critique of these, seeing that ‘youth ministry’ does not discount the issue of providing welfare as in ‘youth work’, but its prime focus is in the ‘building of the church’. This is how the term is used in this study.

²This point developed from Strauss & Corbin (1998, pp.9- 36) and Sheppard (2009, p.9).

³This is developed from Mason (2002, p.178).

explore the lived experience of youth ministers in their enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. Here, mission is defined by the Triune communicative nature of God, the God we encounter in Jesus Christ and includes acts of proclamation, witness and service as is discussed below through the work of Vanhoozer (2010).

At art school and working as a graphic designer, I was intrigued by the values which lay behind the symbols that I was asked to design, why, what, and how did these communicate? As I trained as a youth minister through the Oasis Youth Ministry course in 1997 I was introduced to the more formal aspects of theological training and the questions about my faith and practice became theological. Now, as a Lecturer in Theology and Ministry at Oasis College, and involved in the theological education of practitioners, my interest in the enacting of faith is just as acute. Entwined with this, and through my studies on the DTh Min at King's College London, I gained further theological education. Here, I have discovered the richness, beauty and depth of Trinitarian theology. My experience and desire to explore the lived experience of enacted mission and the richness of Trinitarian theology are brought together through the discipline of practical theology.

Research Themes and Outline of the Thesis

The thesis explores the practice of relationships as communicative acts. This focuses on the voices of the practitioners through narratives of practice, the voice of the literature on youth ministry as missionary endeavour and the normative voice of Trinitarian theology.

One of the developing areas of research within practical theology that resonates with this thesis is Ordinary Theology (Astley 2002) and Ordinary Christology (Christie, 2012). This arena of empirical enquiry is the characteristic of the reflective God-talk of the great majority of churchgoers, and others who remain largely untouched by the assumptions, concepts and arguments that academic theology takes for granted (Astley 2002). This is an exciting area of research, yet is limited for this work due to the youth ministry practitioners involved having had more formal theological training and, therefore, being more aware of the concepts within academic theology. A second related area is seen through the work of Cameron et al (2010, p.54) as they develop a typology for understanding theology in ethnographic studies; this is to be

seen as a working tool and has a particular focus on theology as action research. Action research is not the focus of this study, however, the articulation of the four voices of theology, at least in part, is helpful in illuminating how the youth ministers enact mission amongst non-churched young people. The theological voices that Cameron et al (2010) outline are not to be seen as discrete and separate from one another, the voices can never be heard without the echoes and reverberations of the others. That said, the framework can have a focus on the disconnection between the espoused and operant voices as Cameron et al (2010, p.104) see. This differs from the notion of theological shorthand explored below due to the connection between the espoused and operant theologies seen in the data. However, the idea of theological voices resonates within this piece. Therefore, Cameron et al (2010, p.54) see the theological voices as: a) Operant - the theology that is embedded in the practices of a group, what is done; b) Espoused - what we say we do, the articulation of beliefs; c) Normative theology - the theology named by a group that will allow challenge to the former two voices; d) Formal theology, the theology of the theologians, the academy and dialogue with other disciplines.

The normative voice of theology is concerned with what the group names as its theological authority, this theological authority stands to correct, as well as inform the operant and espoused theologies. Cameron et al (2010, pp.54-55) see that the normative voice is often related to ecclesial identities, scripture or the creeds. This is a varied and complex process and the normative voice can be part of an independent dynamic of scholarly readings of church history, doctrine or approaches to scripture. However, within the practice of the youth ministers, as seen in Chapter Three, it is the youth ministry literature that functions as the normative voice in relation to practice, rather than doctrine, scripture or the Anglican or Baptist traditions of which the youth ministers are part. It is the youth ministry literature that informs the operant and espoused theology of the youth ministers.

Moreover, Cameron et al (2010, p.56) see that within the theological modes of operant and espoused (the forms of theology carried and embedded within Christian practices), practice can challenge both the normative and formal theological voices. The rich discussion about the place of doctrine and Christian practice is explored in Chapter One.

Within the notion of theological shorthand that is explored below, there is resonance between the espoused, operant, normative and formal voices of theology. In the data, the espoused and operant theology within the narratives of practice is expressed as relationships, like Jesus, being there and time and journey and is guided by the normative voice of the youth ministry literature. These terms act as a series of motifs and theological shorthand for the complexity of the enacted theology and the actual practices of the group. Here, theological expression is sedimented out and simplified in relation to the complexities of practice.

What I mean by this, is what is expressed reveals an enacted, embedded and operant theology that evokes and has a relationship to a wider, deeper, richer set of beliefs from within the Christian tradition (formal theology), but this is expressed as shorthand, like a series of motifs and marks. These motifs and marks are the terms of relationship, like Jesus, being there and time and journey. These are meaningful in the animation of practice, but they point and are connected to a deeper theological reality. It means practice is open to the possibility of enrichment and being able to be illuminated and understood from a new perspective.

Therefore, the theological shorthand expression of the complexities of practice is like a pencil sketch; this can be beautiful, meaningful and communicative. Yet, the complexities of the enacted theology embedded within practice can be seen as a full-colour image, therefore, practice can be illuminated, enriched, given more depth and nuance and can be seen from a fresh and different perspective by being brought into conversation with Trinitarian theology.

Therefore, the formal voice of theology is important in this piece and in relation to this notion of theological shorthand. This is because through the Trinitarian discussion within Chapter Four, a light is shone on practice and the accepted authority of the theological voice of the youth ministry literature and the espoused theological shorthand expression of practice. Here, the voice of formal theology, through the Trinitarian theology of Vanhoozer (2010), operates as a *corrective* normative voice in relation to practice. Through this process, the richness of Trinitarian theology serves and enriches practice and helps to understand enacted youth ministry as being authentic and faithful to the Gospel (Swinton and Mowat 2006). Therefore, Trinitarian Theology through the work of Vanhoozer (2010)

challenges the existing assumptions within the youth ministry literature and draws attention to a richer, deeper reading of practice from within the Christian tradition.

To explore relationships as communicative acts, a practical theological methodology is adopted from the work of Swinton and Mowat (2006). The work of Swinton and Mowat (2006) and Vanhoozer (2010) can be situated within the wider framework of Canonical Narrative Theology. Graham et al (2005, p.92) sees this as a strong method for bringing together the story of God as told through the Bible and giving pattern and shape to the human story. Within this, the Bible is normative and defining, whilst our human stories are always partial, contingent and provisional in pattern.⁴ Therefore, it is possible, at least in part, to see practical theology as performing a prophetic role calling the church back to practices which are authentic and faithful to the Biblical story and Christian tradition.

The discussion is set in motion through the following research question: ‘How do youth ministers enact mission amongst non-churched young people?’

As this empirical process is undertaken, there is a sense in which it requires empathy and respect.⁵ As the lived experience of the youth ministers is examined, I want to honour the expertise, commitment and professionalism of these ministers of the Gospel in their service amongst young people, often in very difficult, challenging and hard circumstances. As these expressed forms of enacted mission are brought under scrutiny, there is a real sense that this is Holy ground;⁶ however, rather than diminishing this practice, the understanding of this activity can be enriched by Trinitarian theology.

Distinct Contribution to the Knowledge of Youth Ministry

This Doctorate in Theology and Ministry makes a distinctive contribution to the discussion and knowledge within youth ministry in the following ways:

⁴ This idea of narrative is developed from the work of Barth (1886 – 1968) and Lindbeck (1984). This finds expression in the work of Hauerwas (1986). In Hauerwas’s (1986) thinking, influenced by the philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre, the church has become a ‘school for virtue’, that is understood and embodied by an authentic and faithful practice, thus resonating with Swinton and Mowat (2006).

⁵ Ward (2013, p.1)

⁶ Ward (2013, p.1)

- The relationships that youth ministers establish with young people in the enacting of mission can be seen as communicative acts.
- The expression of these relationships through the terms of like Jesus, being there, time and journey can be seen as theological shorthand.
- This theological shorthand is a non-complex and straight forward way of talking about the complexity and nuances of lived practice. It means the opportunities to see God's Spirit at work, to join with God's communicative action in a variety of ways, is not given enough consideration or scope due to the theological shorthand expression and understanding of the Christian tradition and the Biblical narrative.
- The youth ministry literature can be seen as the normative voice of practice. This is a stronger voice than the Bible and the Anglican and Baptist traditions of which the youth ministers are a part. This is problematic as it risks un-tethering youth ministry from the wider ecclesial frameworks.
- The focus on relationships collapses the classic elements of the church's practices of *diakonia*, *kerygma* and *marturia* into the relational. This turns relationships as communicative acts into a contemporary practice, but this is not intentional and is not reflected upon theologically.
- A more explicit and robust theological re-imagining of relationships as communicative acts has been advanced, locating this within a Trinitarian frame work of communication. Here, God's divine authorship is held within the divine communicative action and through this theological re-imagination the practice of youth ministry is re-tethered into the richness of the Christian tradition. Moreover, it gives the youth ministers a more extensive theological expression and grammar that enables them to articulate their practice in deeper and richer terms. It is a theology for youth ministry.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter One, a methodology of practical theology that enables an answer to the research question is developed and employed. This is investigated by placing qualitative research and the interview in an appropriate cycle of reflection. The cycle of reflection acts as an organising framework that shapes this thesis and is provided by the practical theological hermeneutic adopted from Swinton and Mowat (2006).

This facilitates theological reflection on the embodied acts of mission by the youth ministry practitioners. Therefore, this is essentially a descriptive and exploratory study, rather than a hypothesis-testing one. It follows an inductive rather than deductive approach⁷ and the outcome of this is a ‘thick’, Geertz (1973),⁸ description of the enacted and lived faith of the six youth ministers being studied. The exploration of narratives of practice is important for, as Moschella (2008, p.49) sees, theology and practice as an intertwined phenomena and it is possible to study practices in the hope of being able to read and see the theology they enact and evoke as well as the values they suggest. Therefore, the place of Christian practices is investigated; this discussion advances how the normative voice of theology can act as a rich resource, storehouse and imaginative landscape for enriching practice (Jones 2002). The data gathered from the interview, the start of the analytical process, is further analysed through narrative analyses founded on the work of Riessman (1993). The themes and linguistic connections made across the stories told about enacted mission by the practitioners act as heuristic devices of discovery (Seidel and Kelle 1995, p.58 cf. Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p.30). However, this descriptive-exploratory and inductive approach is converted into the service of practical theology by the methodology adopted from Swinton and Mowat (2006).

Chapter Two sets out narratives of practice, in which the voices of the practitioners are interpreted and presented from the interview data. As analysis of the stories continues, the themes found in and developed from the data are explored. Here, relationships, like Jesus, being there and time and journey are the theological shorthand expression of the complexity of enacted practice and articulate the overarching theme of relationships as communicative acts.

In Chapter Three, a particular focus on the voice of the youth ministry literature as mission, enables further data analysis and theological reflection on relationships as communicative acts. Current youth ministry practice can be seen to be guided by the normative voice and expression of relationships that is articulated through the

⁷ Heitink (1999, p.223 cf. Christie 2012, p.12) sees all empirical research is a conscious process of comparing and evaluating and contains inductive as well deductive moments and the inductive and deductive methods of research do not exclude each other rather they make room for each other.

⁸ Geertz (1973, pp.5-6, 9-10) A ‘thick’ description of a human behavior is a detailed and thorough exploration that seeks to investigate and explain not just human behavior, but its context as well, so the behavior becomes meaningful.

literature on youth ministry. Here, the complex and nuanced expression of practice as theological shorthand is explored further. Youth ministry can be seen as educational, missional and pastoral practice (Borgman 1997 and Sheppard 2009). The missional dimensions of this frame the chapter, as pivotal literature is brought into conversation with the data. The literature does not just seek to re-appropriate the evangelical origins of this term but draws on mission studies and resonates with the work of Young Life, with the incarnation acting as theological justification and model (Root 2007).

Through additional theological reflection in Chapter Four, Trinitarian theology provides a rich resource which is authentic and faithful for practice. However, the Trinitarian discussion requires critique and evaluation for it to provide a normative voice for understanding practice. This is especially pertinent around the term *perichoresis*. The dialogue, through the work of Moltmann (1981), Fiddes (2000), Kilby (2000) and Vanhoozer (2010), will shape the debate as Trinitarian theology is brought into discussion with the themes found in the data. Here the theological discussion enriches, illuminates and provides a new perspective on relationships as communicative acts and the theological shorthand expression of practice.

CHAPTER ONE:

NARRATIVES OF PRACTICE AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

As the lived experience of youth ministers are explored, this practice can be seen as relationships as communicative acts. This is investigated through the voices of the practitioners within the narratives of practice, the voice of the youth ministry literature as missionary endeavour and through Trinitarian theology as a normative voice in relation to renewed practice. These three voices are brought together within the discipline of practical theology. To develop and employ an appropriate methodology, this chapter is divided into three interrelated sections.

The first section examines the scope of practical theology and the place of qualitative research. Here, practical theology as critical faithfulness is investigated and practical theology as critical theological reflection and as *phronesis* is explored. Following this, qualitative research is located within a theological hermeneutic, setting qualitative research in an appropriate cycle of reflection and seeing how this shapes the hermeneutical journey of the thesis.

In the second section, which is dependent on the first, the place of Christian practices is considered; this discusses how the normative voice of theology can act as a resource, storehouse and imaginative landscape for enriching practice (Jones 2002). The normative voice of practice is critiqued and the fluid shape of practice considered.

In the third section, which is interdependent with the other two, the importance of narrative for exploring practice and the issue of insider research are considered and addressed. How participants were identified and the ethical issues involved are described and the interview as an appropriate method of capturing data and creating narratives of practice is investigated. Furthermore, the issues of reflexivity and the framework for data analysis are explored. Here, the tensions of drawing out the themes and linguistic connections from across the stories is examined and the use of the themes as heuristic devices of discovery (Seidel and Kelle 1995, p.58 cf. Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p.30) is discussed. It is these descriptive and inferred themes that express practice through relationships as communicative acts and are seen as

theological shorthand; these are laid out in table form towards the end of this chapter.

To answer the research question, there are two main approaches one could draw on; these are *phronesis* and *habitus*.⁹ Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.26-27) draw on both approaches, however, it is the *phronesis*¹⁰ approach that provides a stronger framework for answering the research question, as it provides a way of correlating the lived experience of the youth ministers, the youth ministry literature and the normative voice of Trinitarian theology as divine authorship and communicative action in the work of Vanhoozer (2010). As a practical theological methodology is developed, I will adopt, follow and primarily draw on the thoughts of Swinton and Mowat (2006), however, Browning (1996), Anderson (2001) Graham (1996), Tanner (2002), Volf (2002), and Dykstra and Bass (2002) and Jones (2002) will be brought into a critical conversation. These key authors help frame the methodological task.

The Scope of Practical Theology

This first section examines the scope of practical theology. Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.6) describe practical theology as the ‘critical, theological reflection on the practices of the church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world’.¹¹ Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.94) seek to be faithful to the performance of the Gospel. Browning (1996) has a relationship with Swinton and Mowat (2006), as they both draw on models of correlation in relation to practical theology that find their foundations in the work of Tillich (1951) which is then built upon and revised through the work of Tracy (1975). However, the outworking of these is different, although both draw on the idea of people as interpretive creatures through the idea of hermeneutics as an ontological process that finds its foundations in the philosophy of Gadamer (1982). Browning (1996) writes from a liberal protestant perspective and sees that practical theology is the critical dialogue

⁹ *Habitus* is developed from the work of Farley (1983, 2003 p.37).

¹⁰ This approach is expressed in Browning’s (1996) and Anderson’s (2001) thinking.

¹¹ The discipline of practical theology has a focus on the interpretation of human experience and the nature of human practices from a theological point of view (Pattison and Woodward 2000, p.8). Ballard and Pritchard (2006, p.12) are in line with this. Practical theology is essentially reflection on both divine and human action (Root 2007, p.19) and how divine reality and human reality relate at the level of experience (Heitink 1999, p.193). An alternative view to practical theology is developed by Van der Ven (1990, 1998, 1999) he calls this ‘empirical theology’.

between implicit questions and the explicit answers given by the Christian tradition and the explicit questions and implicit answers of contemporary cultural experiences and practices. Through this, Browning (1996) argues that the Christian theologian must, in principle, have this conversation with all answers from wherever they may come. Through this correlational model, theology and practice is seen as symmetrical, as all partners in the dialogue have equal weight. Therefore, if adopted for this thesis, it would infer that the voices of the practitioners, the youth ministry literature and Trinitarian theology would have equal say but, as is argued below, this is problematic. A more conservative approach that premises the normative nature of Scripture is provided by Anderson (2001). He again draws on Browning's (1996) thoughts but pushes these in a new direction. Anderson (2001, p.22) describes practical theology as a dynamic process of reflective critical enquiry into the praxis of the church in the world and God's purposes for humanity. He continues and clarifies how the empirical fits into this, as he sees that this is carried out in the light of Christian scripture and tradition and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge. Anderson's (2001, p.53) thoughts are important in providing a dimension that places the methodology in the 'on-going activity of God'; this resonates and chimes with the Trinitarian approach adopted from Vanhoozer (2010), but is missing in Browning's ideas and is less explicit within Swinton and Mowat (2006). Graham (1996) writes from a feminist perspective, but also evokes the work of Browning (1996) as she seeks to interpret where certain discourses come from and whose values they represent. Graham (1996, p.112) aims to draw upon the multiplicity of narratives found within post-modernity which will be engaged in mutually critical dialogue. Graham (1996), therefore, follows Browning (1996) through the adoption of *phronesis* that locates truth in enacted or performative knowledge.

However, for Graham (1996, p.7), values are expressed not in abstract knowledge-claims but in the patterns and orderings of purposeful human activity. Therefore, Graham (1996, p.208-209) views practical theology as the systematic reflection upon the nature of the church in the world, but this is only accessible through the practical wisdom of those communities engaged in practice. Here then, practical theology becomes interpretive, enabling the community of faith to give a critical account of its presence in the world and the values that give shape to its actions. This gives a

normative voice to practice and, in contrast to Swinton and Mowat (2006) and Anderson (2001,) theology arises purely out of the cultural context of practice.

Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.4) see practical theology as dedicated to the enabling and faithful performance¹² of the Gospel and to exploring and taking seriously the complex human encounter with God. Practical theology, therefore, finds itself located within the uneasy but critical tension between the script of revelation given to us in Christ and formulated historically within Scripture, doctrine and tradition, and the on-going innovative performance of the Gospel and theology as it is enacted, performed and embodied in the practices of the church as they interact with the world. As this is explored through narratives of practice, the voices of the youth ministry practitioners, the theology enacted within practice as relationships as communicative acts and the expression of this as theological shorthand will be taken seriously. However, taking this human experience seriously does not imply that experience is a source of revelation, as it is within Graham's (1996) work.

In contrast, Swinton and Mowat (ibid, p.5 -6) see that human experience cannot lead us to an understanding of the cross and resurrection, a point that resonates with Vanhoozer's (2010) theology. However, practical theology acknowledges and seeks to explore the implications of the proposition that faith and theology are performative and embodied acts; that the Gospel is not simply something to be believed but also something to be lived. Human experience becomes the place where the Gospel, doctrine and tradition are grounded, embodied, interpreted and lived out. Therefore, listening to the theological shorthand expression of these within the narratives of practice is worth exploring. This is an interpretive context which raises new questions of the understanding of enacted theology and practice. Therefore, describing the theology of the youth ministry practitioners becomes a hermeneutical process and, as the voices of the practitioners are explored through narratives of practice, it involves a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 1982, Browning 1996) between the researcher's own theology and that of the youth ministers.¹³

¹² They develop this idea from Hauerwas who describes the idea of faith as a performance. Ward (2008, p.33) sees that all faith is embodied or lived in. He sees that, 'in the practice of faith, doctrine is performed as it is prayed, sung, preached and enacted in mission'.

¹³ Christie (2012, p.14) also develops this.

To do this, Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.25) see that practical theology is critical; it assumes that the various practices that are performed by the Christian community within particular situations are deeply meaningful and require critical reflection, if they are to be faithful to the script of revelation, doctrine and tradition. However, to be faithful to the script of revelation, doctrine and tradition raises a number of questions that Swinton and Mowat (2006) do not address. For example: How are we to interpret scripture? Whose doctrine and tradition? What shape does this take? Therefore, in this thesis, these questions are addressed through the work of Vanhoozer (2010) in conversation with Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000) and are explored in Chapter Four.

Practical Theology as Critical Faithfulness

Browning's (1996) and Anderson's (2001) thoughts rely upon models of correlation. Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.88) develop a revised model of mutual critical correlation with a focus on critical faithfulness. To do this, they draw on the work of Tillich (1951), Tracy (1975), and Pattison (1989), with a Christological and a Chalcedonian perspective given through the work of Van Deusen Hunsinger¹⁴ (1995). Swinton and Mowat's (2006, p. 77-88) model finds its origins in the work of Tillich (1951), and it is also heavily influenced by Browning (1996) but, like Anderson (2001), the framework is heavily revised through a Christological perspective and held within a Trinitarian hermeneutic of mission, although this Trinitarian hermeneutic is not explicit. Tillich (1951) sought to correlate existential questions which are drawn from human experience with theological answers offered by the Christian tradition. Therefore, the questions that emerge from human experience (the product of rational reflection) find their answers in Scripture and tradition. Through this method, Tillich sought to achieve a degree of relevance for Christian tradition within a rapidly changing secularizing social context. Tracy (1975)¹⁵ expands the critical dimension of Tillich's model and incorporates a dialectical element which enabled the correlation between scripture, tradition and experience to be mutually correlative and critical. This bias towards equal dialogue

¹⁴ Van Deusen Hunsinger (1995, p.63) draws on the work of Karl Barth and in particular his thinking about the nature of Christ as laid down in the Chalcedonian Creed.

¹⁵ His basic argument is that the social sciences, as a human discipline and Christian thought, can interpret situations and experience in different ways. Tracy (1983, p.77) calls this 'relative adequacy'.

partners leads to a largely existential understanding of faith, as Pattison (1986, p.79) sees.¹⁶ Within Pattison's (1989) conversation model¹⁷ that Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.81-83) focus on to develop their revised model of mutual critical correlation, the practical theologian identifies a situation within the practice of the church or the world which requires further reflection and exploration. This is then explored through other sources of knowledge, for example, qualitative research; through this, the hidden meanings within the situation and the practices that participants take part in can be uncovered. This data is then brought into conversation with scripture, doctrine and tradition with a view to developing revised forms of practice that will impact and transform the original situation. The intension within this model is to broaden, deepen and, if necessary, challenge both ecclesial practice and theological understandings in the light of current practice. Pattison (2007a, p.249) seeks to embrace perspectives on practice that offer a more stringent and even contradictory explanation of current practice. This, in his view, helps enhance the critical reflection upon the situation under investigation. Within this model, as Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.82) argue, the data acquired through qualitative research has an equal voice within the conversation and can challenge theology and tradition in exactly the same way as theology and tradition can challenge its findings; again this is symmetrical and finds its foundations in Tillich's (1951), Tracy's (1975) and Browning's (1996) work. Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.83) are sympathetic to this model but see that in principle the epistemological function of social sciences can be given priority over theology and this is particularly problematic.

Therefore, in the exploration and interpretation of the lived experience of youth ministers practice as relationships as communicative acts and the resonance of this in the youth ministry literature, it is Trinitarian theology as communicative action, through the work of Vanhoozer (2010), that provides a normative voice to understand how relationships as communicative acts can be enriched to be more authentic and faithful to the Gospel. In this, it is important to be able to premise truth and revelation, whilst, at the same time, holding onto the interpretive dimensions of the way enacted youth ministry practice interacts with Scripture and

¹⁶ For more on this see Pattison (2007b, p.77) and Browning (1983, p.14).

¹⁷ Pattison (1989) sees that an 'open and dangerous' conversation takes place between the Christian tradition, the social sciences and the particular situation that is being explored.

tradition. Developing Van Deusen Hunsinger's (1995) ideas, Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.91) note how the idea of hospitality is important. Here, hospitality is shown towards the research method the practical theologian is working with. In this piece, it means that a context and space where the voice of the practitioners, through the qualitative interview, can be heard, respected and taken seriously is created. Moreover, the theological offer of hospitality is crucial for the type of reflective and interpretive conversation between the voice of the practitioners through the interview, the youth ministry literature and normative voice of Trinitarian theology that is being discussed. Therefore, Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.92-94)¹⁸ see that qualitative research needs to undergo a process of conversion. What they mean by this is that qualitative research moves from a position of fragmentation and without a specific goal or telos, to a position where it is grafted into God's redemptive intentions for the world. Therefore, God converts the field of intellectual enquiry outside of theology and uses it in the service of making himself known within the church and then on into the world. This approach resonates and interrelates with the Trinitarian theology adopted from Vanhoozer (2010) as a divinely authored communicative action, as both, at least in part, are influenced by the theology of Barth and reverberate with insights from the reformed tradition. It means, in this piece, that the interview develops its critique from the inside and the epistemological framework becomes unalterably theistic, but always open to the possibility of the new. This approach is marked by critical faithfulness. In this research, such faithfulness acknowledges the divine given-ness of Scripture, how God speaks and acts, as seen in the work of Vanhoozer (2010), and the genuine working of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of this, whilst simultaneously taking seriously the interpretive dimensions of understanding revelation within the voices of the practitioners. However, this entire enterprise is held within God's triune communicative action as it joins with human agency in, to and for the world as charted in Chapter Four.

Practical Theology as Critical Theological Reflection

Browning (1996, p.6) argues that, as we approach the theological task of understanding the practices of the church in the world, we do so with questions

¹⁸ See Swinton (2011).

shaped by the secular and religious practices in which we are implicated. These practices are meaningful or *theory-laden*. For Browning (1996, p.6), this means that theory is not distinct from practice. All our practices have theories behind and within them. However, we may not notice these theories in our practices. We are, therefore, so embedded in our practices that we take them for granted and view them as so natural that we do not take time to examine and reflect upon them. Drawing on Browning's (1996) thoughts, Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.20) see that there is no such thing as a value-free form of practice. In a very real sense, belief is in the act itself and is seen in the faithful performance of the Gospel. Our practices are filled with theological content (Volf 2002, Jones 2002, Pauw 2002 and Moschella 2008) and, when reflected upon, are found to be rich in meaning (Browning 1996). Therefore, the practical theological task enables theological reflection on practice. In this thesis, the task of practical theology is to mediate the relationship between the current understanding of enacted youth ministry practice of relationships as communicative acts as expressed in the data, and the Christian tradition through the normative voice of Trinitarian theology. The research moves from practice to theological reflection on practice to suggestions for re-imagined and youth ministry practice, an idea that resonates with Browning's (1996)¹⁹ thoughts; however, the approach adopted differs from Browning in that Swinton and Mowat (2006) premise theology over the social sciences. Therefore, in the approach adopted from Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.11) theological reflection is facilitated by the social sciences as it seeks to discern, critique and illuminate discrepancies in the practices of the church and point to more authentic and faithful alternatives, an idea that echoes Anderson's (2001) thoughts. Here the task of practical theology is to remind the church of the ways in which it differs from the world and to ensure that its practices remain faithful to the script of the Gospel.²⁰ Therefore, in this research, theological reflection is to be seen as theoretical enquiry, seeking to interpret enacted youth ministry practice, to evaluate, critique and importantly, serve and help express what is done and what is said.

¹⁹ Alternatively, reflection for Browning (1996, p.6) has a particular starting point. Theological reflection begins when a community of faith hits a 'crisis' in its practice.

²⁰ In this, Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.10) draw on Forrester (1990, p.16) who sees that the actions of Christians are celebrations of and attestations to God's reconciling work in the world through Christ.

For Anderson (2001, p.53), and within this piece of research, the activity of theological reflection is held within the divine work of God. Here, practical theology has a particular focus to the on-going pursuit of competence through critical theological reflection. However, this competence does not merely arise through repetition and practice of methods, as seen in Browning's (1996) work, but, importantly, is gained through participation in the work of God. He calls this Christopraxis. For Anderson (2001, p.29), Christopraxis 'is the continuing ministry of Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit'. This becomes the authoritative grounding of an objective reality. This is consummated 'in Christ' and continued through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, an idea that resonates with Vanhoozer's (2010) thinking.

For Anderson (2001), the decisions made in ministry situations are in line with Christ's own purpose as he acts and stands within the situation and with us. This is similar to Swinton and Mowat's (2006) thoughts on the faithful performance of the Gospel, but he gives this greater theological depth, as God acts through our human actions to reveal truth. Yet, it raises the question, 'What does it mean for Christ to stand in the situation with us?'. Vanhoozer (2010) is more explicit on this, as he locates human agency as participation in Christ's *mythos* and history, as navigated in Chapter Four.²¹ However, as this subject of theological reflection is considered, Graham et al (2005, p.1)²² argue that theological reflection is easier said than done and see that theological reflection is largely narrow and under-theorized and too often fails to connect adequately with biblical, historical and systematic scholarship. Graham (2005, p.7) continues that theological reflection is often weak in its use of traditional Christian resources and doctrine and has had an uneasy relationship with the Bible. This important point about the Bible is addressed in this thesis through the work of Vanhoozer (2010) and the issue of doctrine navigated through the differing views on the *perichoresis* and the operant mode of participation through the theology of Moltmann (1981), Kilby (2000), Fiddes (2000) and Vanhoozer (2010).

²¹ Anderson (2001, p.39) sees that St Paul has a profound grasp of the Trinitarian relations. This has an impact on Browning's (1996) model because Paul's theological foundation is more substantive than mere ethical instruction or practical reasons.

²² Graham et al (2005, p.8-10) argue that all theology should be seen as practical theology, a point that reverberates with Browning's (1996) argument found within a 'Fundamental Theology'.

Practical theology as Phronesis and Faithful Living

Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.6), as discussed, see the task of practical theology as ensuring faithful living and Christian practice in faithfulness to the Gospel. This is to enable a personal and communal *phronesis*, a form of practical wisdom combining theory and practice in the praxis of individuals and communities. This idea of *phronesis* is evident in Browning's (1996) work, as it aims for an embodied practical knowledge that enables a particular form of God-oriented lifestyle. Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.26) see this as resonating with Farley's (1983) concept of habitus; although they differ, they both include an orientation devoted to the practical but critical living out of faith. Within this critical living out of faith, Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.27) argue that practical theology is fundamentally a missiological discipline that receives its dynamic from acknowledging and working out what it means to participate faithfully in mission of the Trinitarian God, as echoed in Anderson's (2001) and Vanhoozer's (2010) work, but is missing from Browning's (1996) ideas. For Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.27), it is this mission that provides the hermeneutic which guides practical theology in each dimension of its task. The task, therefore, of practical theology is not simply to understand the world but also to change it, seeking not only, 'What difference will this make in the pulpit and pew?', but also, 'Who is God and how does one know more fully His Truth?'

Within Browning's (1996) thinking, this form of *phronesis* is, therefore, particularly problematic,²³ as his work echoes with enlightenment thinking and is Kantian in foundation, as Browning (1996, p.11) blends his thinking with Kant and also goes beyond Kant to certain strands of Aristotelian teleology. This opens up Browning (1996) to accusations of relying too much on human thought and not enough on divine activity. Therefore, reason becomes a source and not just a tool. Related to this is that Browning places *phronesis* on the same footing as Christianity, therefore theology is not given logical priority, as it is within the work of Swinton and Mowat (2006). As Anderson (2001, p.30) argues, whilst Browning (1996)²⁴ does include Christology, he does so primarily as a component of systematic theology that belongs to his 'outer envelope'. This is positioned as 'part of the community of

²³ Anderson (2001, p.29) sees that, although helpful in locating an understanding of God, in practice, 'phronesis' could be seen to marginalise the sense of God's on-going activity to just 'historical consciousness' and 'community memory'.

²⁴ The difference is that Anderson (2001) places Christopraxis at the centre, rather than experience, foregrounding Christology, interrelated to a Trinitarian foundation.

memory' with its 'historical consciousness' expressed as creed and dogma. However, Anderson argues that the ministry of Jesus (through the Holy Spirit) is as authoritative as the teaching of Jesus. Therefore, for Anderson, Christology must be related to Christopraxis. This means the present reality of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, stirs us to theological reflection and also locates our practice in the on-going activity of the Trinitarian God. Anderson (2001, p.46), therefore, argues that practical theology needs a solid theological foundation so that the practical does not overwhelm and determine the theological. Alongside this, the subject matter of theology is not located just in the 'historical consciousness' of the community in the form of its creeds and dogma, rather, theology must continue to reflect on the contemporary work of the Holy Spirit as the praxis of the risen Christ. Anderson (2001, p. 47) sees praxis as involving tasks but, in the performing of those tasks, meaning is discovered and not merely applied. In this, he relates to and follows Browning's (1996, p.6) 'theory- laden' model above. But this lack of objective reality within Browning's framework is taken up through Anderson's (2001, p.22) Christopraxis approach. It grounds a practical theological methodology in Christopraxis as the inner-core of its encounter with the Spirit's on-going ministry in the world. Anderson's approach resonates and compliments Vanhoozer's (2010) theology, but Vanhoozer (2010) provides a more convincing and robust argument for Trinitarian theology as communicative action that becomes pivotal in exploring the overarching themes discovered in the data of relationships as communicative acts and the expression of this as theological shorthand.

Furthermore, in Anderson's (2001) thinking, Browning's (1996) model is adopted and modified and the questions, 'How then should we live?' and 'What should we do?' become inherently theological and Christological, as well as ethical, when asked with respect to what God has revealed through his Word and what God is doing through the power of his Spirit. For Anderson (2001, p.52), this becomes the on-going hermeneutical task given to the church in its practice of practical theology. Anderson (2001, p.38) describes a hermeneutical practice of theology as beginning with theological reflection on the context and crisis of ministry in relation to reading the text of Scripture in light of the 'text of lives' that manifest the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit. This is why Anderson can replace experience as central to Browning's (1991) model with Christopraxis, because Christopraxis holds

experience in the on-going activity and work of God and human actions reveal this truth. Anderson's (2001) thoughts are important, in particular how the activity of practical theology is placed in the on-going activity of God and also gives it a Christological focus interrelated to a Trinitarian foundation. However, Anderson's (2001) framework raises two points. Firstly, and in line with Swinton and Mowat (2006), Anderson (2001, p.30) sees it is the role of Scripture that becomes normative, resonating with Vanhoozer (2010). Although normative, and this differs from Swinton and Mowat (2006), but echoes with Vanhoozer (2010), is shown through the on-going Christopraxis, there is still a difficult tension to explore; who decides what is normative and how is such an interpretation reached? In this thesis, this is approached through Vanhoozer (2010), who adopts a Canonical approach. Secondly, and relevant to the research question, is how do we interpret living texts and situations in the light of Christopraxis (Anderson (2001, p.37)). This is not altogether clear and as such Anderson's (2001) hermeneutic of practical theology has a particular bias to Biblical interpretation rather than the interpretation of particular situations and practices that is found within Swinton and Mowat (2006). To excavate and interpret the lived experience of youth ministry as enacted mission, qualitative research is placed in an appropriate cycle of reflection. This is the subject that is examined next.

Qualitative Research within a Theological Hermeneutic

Through the methodology adopted from Swinton and Mowat (2006), qualitative research and the interview can be used to interpret the enacted practice of youth ministry and the insights generated can lead to a deeper understanding of practice. This is a hermeneutical and descriptive process and, as I seek to articulate the practice and theological expression of the youth ministers, it is approached with empathy, patience and great care. With this in mind, and as Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.73) see, there are tensions between qualitative research and theology, especially around the issues of epistemology and truth which leads to a tension that needs to be resolved. Therefore, this needs to be done in such a way that the constructivist nature of qualitative research enquiry does not overwhelm the theological. This is negotiated through conducting research within a theological hermeneutic and by placing qualitative research within an appropriate cycle of reflection. An outline of how this hermeneutical journey structures this thesis is

given below, however, before coming to this, it is helpful to describe some of the main aspects of qualitative research. Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.28) see that qualitative research has the potential to be faithful and illuminating in providing a rich and deeper understanding of Christian practice that is derived from empirical enquiry (Swinton and Mowat 2006, p.94-96). There are differences between quantitative and qualitative research²⁵ that highlight why qualitative research is more suitable for answering the research question. Qualitative research enables the researcher to explore the social world in an attempt to access and understand the ways that individuals and communities inhabit it. It searches for meaning in specific situations and social contexts where subjectivity is valued. It involves an inductive approach, often utilising small groups with intensive research, with data captured through observation, participant observation and interviews from which a detailed description of events can emerge. Here, qualitative research becomes, not a quest for objectivity, but for meaning, a deeper and richer understanding of situations. Furthermore, Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.47) see that doubts over generalisation can be alleviated, if we think in terms of identification and resonance. This means that, whilst a qualitative research project may not be immediately transferable, there should be a degree of identification and resonance with others working in similar circumstances which may not be identical, but hold enough similarity to create a potentially transformative resonance. Thus, generalisation is not a goal for qualitative research; however, the data captured and produced can frequently have implications beyond the immediacy of the research context. There is a tension here that needs to be acknowledged between the purposive sampling method adopted and the generalisation of the data. This is explored below.

To create and explore the lived experience of youth ministry practice a qualitative approach is adopted. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.8) see that qualitative research is an approach and not a specific method, since research can take a variety of forms depending upon the disciplinary focus and topic of enquiry.²⁶ Developing this, Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.3) see that qualitative research is multi-faceted, allowing and involving a naturalistic and interpretive approach to its subject matter.

²⁵ This is a well-rehearsed debate. For the difference between quantitative and qualitative research see Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.45), Heitink (1999, p.222) and Astley (2002, p.97-100). Christie (2012, p. 17) also makes this point.

²⁶ Shepherd also makes this point (2009, p.53)

Therefore, qualitative researchers study and seek to interpret the lived experience of people and their actions, seeking to describe certain phenomena in the terms of the meanings people bring to them. Within the work of Browning (1996) and Swinton and Mowat (2006) due to the influence of Gadamer, any description of events is hermeneutical. Within this approach, the researcher brings their pre-understandings into conversation with the practices of the subjects being explored. Therefore, the exploration and description of someone else's practice and theology is a hermeneutical process, as Christie (2012, p.14) sees. It involves the theological presuppositions of the researcher and this theology becomes the lens through which they view the practice and theology of others. As Astley (2002, p.15, cf Christie 2012, p.15) argues 'in describing your theology I am implicitly engaged in a conversation between my theology and yours, at least to some extent. My perspective influences what comes to my attention as I listen to you talk about your practice and faith'. Therefore, as Christie (2012, p.15) sees, the personal religious and cultural history of the researcher, including their theological presuppositions, commitments and preoccupations are all relevant to what they hear and interpret in the conversations with the research subjects. Therefore, these personal characteristics form the interpretative paradigm which contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological and methodological premise (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This set of beliefs guides the researcher in action. Therefore, the involvement of the researcher is a very necessary and constructive dimension of the interpretive process and forms an integral part of the theological hermeneutic. Within this research, as the enacted practice and the voices of the youth ministers are interpreted, I am able to listen and paint a theological picture that is an interpretation of their embodied practice because of my involvement and experience within the discipline of youth ministry. All of this is guided and interpreted by my own Christian convictions and theological presuppositions, of which I can be aware, but cannot step beyond. This is explored below through reflexivity and insider research. However, it is worth declaring that my interpretive paradigm is in line with the broader Canonical Narrative Theology within which this research sits.

With this in mind, Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.94) propose a framework which will bring together the things that have been discussed. They create a four stage interrelated model which is based on the pastoral cycle. This finds its origins in the

work of Browning (1996) and is helpful in locating the place and function of qualitative research within a theological hermeneutic. This framework is adopted, but it has been adapted to suit the research question.

Stage One: How do youth ministers enact mission amongst non-churched young people?

The starting point for this study derives from my experience of professional practice with a desire to explore the lived experience of youth ministers in their enacted mission amongst non-churched young people.

Stage Two: The interview, data collection and investigation into six youth ministry practitioners' practice of enacted mission amongst non-churched young people.

In this phase, qualitative research has been adopted to develop narratives of practice. Through the interview, the stories of actual enacted mission amongst non-churched young people are collected. This begins a disciplined and patient investigation, a slowing down of the various dynamics that are taking place within current youth ministry practice. As this is explored, and the voices heard, a process of analysis begins to develop, forming a deep and rich understanding of the complex dynamics of each situation, thus creating narratives of practice. Through engaging with the complexities of these narratives of practice, new insights about their structure and nature begin to appear. Some of this confirmed initial, intuitive reflections, but new ideas and thoughts emerged from the data that challenged and enhanced what is known about youth ministry as enacted mission. The data is explored and presented in Chapter Two. As the data is explored, relationships are affirmed as an overarching theme expressed by the practitioners. These function as communicative acts and can be seen as theological shorthand.

Stage Three: Chapter Three: Narratives of Practice and the Youth Ministry Literature

In Chapter Three, the data analysis continues, as the narratives of practice are brought into conversation with the youth ministry literature. This explores further the idea of relationships as communicative acts and the resonance of this through the literature. Current youth ministry practice can be seen to be guided by the normative voice and expression of relationships that is articulated through the literature on

youth ministry. This discussion is framed through the work of *Youth Apart* (1996), Ward (1997), Borgman (1997), Green and Christian (1998), Dean (2004), Sudworth et al (2007), Root (2007), Collins et al (2006) and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008). Following Swinton and Mowat (2006), this analysis is undertaken within the theological hermeneutic that has been adopted. Therefore, to situate this within a theological methodology requires a focused stage of theological reflection. As Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.96) see, theology has not been absent, but here, reflection is more intentional and carried out in a more formal manner. Here, through this further stage of analysis, it can be seen how the literature has shaped current practice and this leads to critique the limits of this.

Stage Four: Chapter Four: Narratives of Practice and Trinitarian Theology

In Chapter Four, the insights from the data (Chapter Two) and the further analysis of the data (Chapter Three) are drawn together and brought into conversation with the literature on the Trinity. This adds another level of analysis and Trinitarian Theology acts as a normative voice in seeking to serve and critique enacted youth ministry practice. Yet, for the Trinity to provide a normative voice for this practice, the differing ideas around the *perichoresis* and the Trinitarian discussions require critique. Here, in critical conversation with Moltmann (1981), Kilby (2000), Fiddes (2000) and Vanhoozer (2010), the overarching theme from the data of relationships as communicative acts, is re-imagined, moving from practice that is expressed and seen as theological shorthand, to practice that can be more authentic and faithful to the Gospel by locating this in God's divine authorship and communicative action through the work of Vanhoozer (2010).²⁷

The Normative Voice of Theology in Serving and Critiquing Practice

This second section explores the normative voice of theology in serving and critiquing practice. Practical theology, as has been discussed, is the ensuring of faithful practices of individuals and communities; therefore, it is important to determine what Christian practices are.

²⁷ Ward (2008, p.36) is critical of the methodologies of correlation that are found within Swinton and Mowat (2006), Browning (1996), Anderson (2001), Tillich (1951) and Tracey (1975), arguing that they represent a modern view of thinking which articulates a dislocation and theological fragmentation between experience and revelation that is then emphasised through the pastoral cycle and its associated methodologies of correlation.

Historically, practical theology has tended to focus on the techniques of the church rather than their theological content and intent. Within this understanding the term practice is related first and foremost to particular technical procedures which ministers must learn in order to minister effectively. This forms the basis for the applied model of practical theology, as Ballard and Pritchard (2006, p.58-59) note. Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.17) continue that the applied model of practical theology is when Biblical studies, historical and philosophical studies are taken by the practical theologian and used to develop techniques for ministry. Here the task is simply to apply doctrine worked out by other theological disciplines to practical situations. Within this understanding, it is assumed that practice is something that individuals do to one another. The individual and the action carried out are assumed not to have any necessary connection with the wider community, or social and historical context within which the practice emerges and is carried out. This means that, when the 'effect of the action' is understood only as a goal and end to itself, as a 'function', practices can become dislocated from their historical and theological roots, becoming a partial expression of their true meaning and purpose. It finds expression in the data as theological shorthand in Chapter Two and reverberates through the literature on youth ministry in Chapter Three. Cahlan (2008, p. 107), in addition, sees that when doctrine is used in inappropriate ways, it can diminish dialogue, questioning and experience. If presented inappropriately, doctrine can lack historical perspective and be over rational.

In contrast, and in line with Swinton and Mowat (2006), tradition and doctrine offer a store house of critical perspectives for contemporary and situated practices; through specific settings practical theology opens a window onto this larger tradition; thus theology serves, illuminates, critiquing situations and practices providing clarity and the indispensable core of ideas which animate and bring to life the community's witness of faith. Cahlan's (2008, p.81) views are important, but differ from Swinton and Mowat (2006), Anderson (2001) and Graham (1996). However, they resonate with Browning (1996) and Pattison (1989), as Cahlan understands theology as symmetrical and dialogical that is engaged in a mutual conversation with the cultural context, practice and the tradition within which the practice sits. A fuller understanding of the term 'practice' is provided by Dykstra and Bass (2002, p.18). They describe practices that together constitute a way of life. By

Christian practices, they mean ‘things people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world’. It is possible to see the reverberation of these ideas in the voices of the practitioners, through relationships as communicative acts as they respond to young people who are suffering (Chapter Two) and, furthermore, they are echoed and reflected in the literature on youth ministry (Chapter Three).

As the shape of Christian practices is explored, it is possible to see differing intellectual traditions at work. Within the work of Dykstra and Bass (2002), Swinton and Mowat (2006) and Volf (2002), it is possible to see the influence of the moral philosophy of MacIntyre, as Dykstra and Bass (2002) are indebted to MacIntyre’s concept of ‘social practices’. Also Swinton and Mowat (2006) and Volf (2002) use Dykstra and Bass’s (2002) definition of ‘practice’, whilst Tanner (2002) and Graham (1996) draw on the social theorist Pierre Bourdieu. This is important because MacIntyre’s virtue ethics emphasize that practices pursue the good in a traditional way, while social scientists, influenced by Marxist thought, stress the negotiations over power that give particular shape to practices in specific social situations, as seen outworked through Tanner’s (2002) and Graham’s (1996) related approaches.

Christian Practices and a Way of Life

With this in mind, Dykstra and Bass (2002, pp.20-22) argue that Christian practices constitute elements of a way of life that becomes incarnate when human beings live in the light of and in response to God’s gift of life; Christian practices have a normative and theological dimension. When participation in such practices occurs, people taking part in God’s work of creation and re-creation grow into a deeper understanding of God. Therefore, normatively and theologically understood, Christian practices are the human activities in and through which people co-operate with God in addressing the needs of the other and creation. As Dean (2004, p.151) sees, the word ‘practice’ comes from the Greek root meaning ‘to do’ and ‘to act’; practices knit us into the long history of Christian ‘doing’ and strengthen us for the active mission that God lays before us. Yet, as Dean argues, practices do not transform us, *grace* does, but practices are God’s multifaceted means of grace in the material world of human interaction. They become conduits of love that enliven and animate our witness. Dean (2004, p.154) lays out a constellation of classical

Christian Practices. The practices in focus for this thesis are: *marturia*, witnessing to the self-giving love of God in Christ; *koinonia* fellowship and hospitality; *diakonia*, serving and helping others; and *kerygma*, proclaiming the love of God.²⁸ These are interwoven, but have distinct elements, but, as the data shows in Chapter Two, these traditional elements are collapsed into the relational. Dykstra and Bass (2002, p.20), argue that Christian practices can provide a normative understanding of what God wants for us and how we can discern how God is at work and how we are to be faithful and responsive to God's Spirit.²⁹

This is beneficial, but, in seeking to answer the research question I am developing a methodology in which theology provides the normative voice for shaping practice. This is an alternative view to the normative role of practice as provided by Dykstra and Bass (2002, p.20), Tanner (2002) and Graham (1996). Volf (2002, p.258), who emphasises a different side of the same concern as Dykstra and Bass (2002, p.7), argues how theology and beliefs normatively shape Christian practices. By beliefs he means the core Christian doctrines, as the ideational side of the act of faith. Volf (2002 p.247) recognises the shaping place of doctrine, but this is different from Chalan (2008, p.85), as doctrine provides the normative voice of theology with which she disagrees. However, Volf (2002, p.263) argues that theology should serve practice, through its normative dimension, therefore, helping us to see, illuminating and critiquing specific situation and practices.³⁰ Within Swinton and Mowat's (2006, p.89) approach, primacy is given to Scripture, tradition and revelation in how they provide a normative voice for faithful performance of the Gospel; in the work of Vanhoozer (2010), this finds explicit expression. However, at the same time, Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.89) recognise that the ways in which revelation is interpreted embodied and worked out are deeply influenced by specific contexts and traditions. These contexts, histories and traditions profoundly impact the types of practices that are developed in response to revelation and how these remain faithful to that revelation. This then is a creative tension between Scripture, doctrine and

²⁸ These practices have been chosen because of how they link and interrelate to the themes within the data. For how they interrelate see Table C on page 49.

²⁹ Sheppard (2009, pp.38-42) also develops this.

³⁰ Osmer (2008, p.139-160) also makes this point.

tradition that leads to a flexible integrity rather than unbending rigidity.³¹ In line with this, Jones (2002, p.74-75) also sees how doctrine can serve and enrich practices. Jones sees the normative voice of these and argues how doctrine can be an imaginative landscape that serves as the conceptual territory within which Christians stand to get their conceptual bearings on the world and on the reality of God. In this sense, doctrines are imaginative spaces which we occupy – we inhabit them and learn to negotiate the complexities of our living through them. However, in a similar way to Swinton and Mowat (2006), they are not walled off but their borders are permeable, yet within them, distinct theological landmarks can be found.³² Jones (2002, p.75) also sees that doctrines are dramatic scripts which Christians perform, again resonating with Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.4-5). Here, with doctrine as a script, this unfolding occurs according to ruled patterns of thought and action. Therefore, doctrine provides a scripted code for the motions of the Christian life, but doctrines cannot be conceived apart from their relationship to patterned forms of practice because, as imaginative landscapes and dramatic scripts, they are always occupied by the authoring motions of those who live within them, an approach that resonates with Volf's (2002) thoughts and with Vanhoozer (2010) as part of the divinely authored action; the *theodrama*.

The Normative Voice of Practice

However, a different view of normativity is given by Graham (1996, p.6-7). As Graham approaches practices, she argues that issues of normativity should be approached reflexively and not prescriptively, as dialogue and reflection arise out of the practical wisdom of communities. Here truth and value are not conceived as transcendent realities but as provisional – yet binding, and form strategies of normative action. This is in contrast to Swinton and Mowat (2006), Anderson (2001), Volf (2002), Dykstra and Bass (2002), Chalan (2008), Jones (2002) and Vanhoozer (2010). In Graham's (1996, p.205-2007) approach, Osmer (2008, p.159) argues that normativity means that the idea of 'transforming practice'³³ is pivotal

³¹ Pauw (2002, p.42)

³² These are the truths found within revelation, such as, 'God is the creator of the universe and wills to be in covenant relationship with humanity, but humanity has turned from God in sin. God sent Jesus Christ into the world to redeem humanity from sin and promises the world forgiveness of sins and life eternal' (Jones 2002, p.75). This resonates with Vanhoozer (2010).

³³ Moreover, Graham (1996, p.7) sees 'practice' as the place of transformative action and the place of divine activity. Related to both of these, we can see in existing practices new forms of practice that may challenge and critique the received tradition.

because it becomes the generative source of new knowledge, values and social patterns.³⁴ Graham (1996, p.205-207) argues primarily that the point of ‘transforming practice’ is to disclose God. In this, the faith community, through its practices, becomes a way of enacting and naming the divine presence in the world. Therefore, the faith community becomes the medium, sign, model and witness of such transcendence, an idea that finds resonance with Tillich (1962) and in the voices of the practitioners (Chapter Two) and the literature on youth ministry (Chapter Three) through relationships as communicative acts. Furthermore, Graham’s (1996) approach locates itself as the ‘critical inquiry into the validity of Christian Witness’. It, therefore, opens up the study of the whole mission of the church as expressed within the diversity of its practices as the church seeks to communicate and mediate the faith. For practice to become transformative, Graham (1996, p.112) sees that this involves searching for ways of enacting and performing consistently and authentically a tradition of values. However, these recognise their own contingency but, at the same time, seek to create new forms of practice that still have some degree of discipline, transparency and coherence. Osmer (2008, p.154) sees that it means theology must find new ways of developing truth claims and values that will be persuasive to a sceptical, postmodern world. This is both important and problematic. It is important, because it takes context and the lived experience seriously. Yet, it is also particularly problematic, because Graham (1996, p.7) discounts the normative function of Scripture as the primary foundation for the formation of a community of faith and practice. Furthermore, she seems to take into account but then discounts the value of the Christian tradition. Moreover, if, as Graham (1996, p.7) argues, there is no universal and over-arching metaphysical guarantee for principled living – no ‘god given’, as it were, then on what basis is truth constructed and contested, if values are no longer axiomatic and founded upon the grand narrative of historical certainty? If this is the case, then what stops a community’s practice becoming introspective and self-serving?

This is a point echoed by Pauw (2002, p.43) who, in contrast to Graham (1996), argues that, in fact, a religious community’s best insights into the possibilities and

³⁴ Within this, she offers three criteria with which to guide and assess transforming practice in the church. Firstly, does this contribute to ‘human liberation’ as an expression of the Christian commitment to love and freedom? Secondly, does this attend to women’s experience without ‘essentialising’ this? Thirdly, does this support a reflexive consolidation of practical wisdom that emerges out of practice, which is held within a commitment to alterity?

deformity of its beliefs and practices often come from outside, as critical reflection is required in order to unmask the perennial human tendencies of triumphalism and self-description that those within the community may not be aware of and not sufficiently alert to these tendencies within their midst. In addition, Graham's (1996) thoughts are again problematic because of the placing of so much emphasis on whether it is possible to speak about the 'infinite' and 'undetermined world' of God in the language of the 'contingent' and 'finite' world of practice (Graham et al 2005, p.195), a point echoed by Vanhoozer (2010). As Lakeland (1997, p.49 cf. Graham et al 2005, p.195) argues, 'What does it mean to say that God is real?' Subsequently, relating to the argument of Graham's (1996) positioning within a post-modern context, concern is expressed that exposure to post-modernism means we are in danger of descending into nihilism. Finally, another problem is that it is possible to see this kind of postmodern practical theology as elevating practice as the guiding criterion of Christian theological identity, as something entirely antinomian, spontaneous and led by the spirit of the age, rather than being rooted in Christian revelation and tradition (Graham et al, 2005, p.198). The normative role of practice, as expressed through relationships as communicative acts, echoes within the voices of the practitioners as explored in Chapter Two, because it is guided by the normative voice and expression of relationships as a practice that is articulated through the literature on youth ministry as discussed in Chapter Three.

That said, Graham (1996) argues that the proper focus of practical theology is not the pastoral agent, or theological ethics, or applied theology, but the practice of the faith community itself, an important point in relation to the research question as the enacted practice of the youth ministers is investigated. Graham (1996, p.7) sees that, by focusing on the reality of practice, we are able to recognise that theory and practice do not exist independently. Here, she follows Browning (1996)³⁵ to see that the arena of Christian praxis is value-directed and theory-laden action. However, this idea is pushed further as the medium through which the Christian community embodies and enacts its vision of the Gospel. Here theology is conceived as an enacted performed discipline in which the criterion of authenticity is deemed to be

³⁵ However, Graham (1996) is critical of Browning's (1991) emphasis within practical theology as the production of ethical perspectives derived from the practice of communities. Rather, as Ward (2008, p.46) sees, she seeks to interpret the contingent and enacted nature of theology that is located within the practice of communities. Within this, she argues, it is possible to capture glimpses of Divine activity amidst human practice, resonating with Tanner (2002) and Ward's (2008) thoughts.

‘orthopraxis’ or authentic transformative action, rather than just orthodoxy (right belief).³⁶ As relationships as communicative acts and the theological shorthand expression of this is explored, this distinction is important. The practice of the youth ministers has a focus on right action (orthopraxis), on performing a function this evokes and has a connection to deeper set of ‘right’ beliefs (orthodoxy) from the Christian Tradition, yet this is only partially expressed.

Developing the ideas of orthopraxis and orthodoxy, Volf (2002, p.258) recognises the normative place of beliefs and doctrine in shaping practice, yet, he also sees that engaging in practices can lead to acceptance and a deeper understanding of these beliefs and that these lead to transformation. Volf (2002, p.258) argues, engagement in practices helps us to see how core beliefs and doctrines are to be understood and critiqued as Christians live in ever changing situations. This is because beliefs are always held in situational and contextual rendered forms, a point echoed by Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.90). Moreover, as we have seen, it is possible to suggest, at least in part, that even when given logical priority, theology itself can be the subject of critical reflection and challenge (Swinton and Mowat 2006, p.90). This is important, but as Volf (2002, p.254) argues, the whole way of life with all its practices is supported and shaped by something outside of this way of life – by what God has done, is doing and will do. Therefore, more than just normatively guiding practices, Christian doctrines narrate the divine actions by which humanity is constituted as agents of practices, a point that connects and runs like a thread through Vanhoozer’s (2010) theology. Therefore, as Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.25) argue, the practical theological task is the quest for truth and the development and maintenance of faithful and transformative practices that enable the church to perform faithfully to the Gospel as it participates in God’s Triune mission to the world. This echoes Anderson’s (2001) and Vanhoozer’s (2010) work, placing the on-going activity of practical theology in the on-going activity of God. It differs from Graham (1996), as it locates truth and value as transcendent realities that go beyond that of culturally bound practice.

³⁶ Chung (1990) also sees this.

The Fluid Shape of Practice

An alternative view for the place of Christian practice is provided by Tanner (2002). This differs from Volf (2002) and Jones (2002), but resonates with the normative nature of practice as seen through Dykstra and Bass (2002). Tanner (2002, p.228) sees that theology is important in everyday Christian life. For Tanner (2002, p.228), theological inquiry is forced by the vagaries of Christian practices themselves, and is, therefore and consequently, a necessary part of their ordinary function. What this means is that theological reflection does not merely come to Christian practices from the outside, as articulated through Volf's (2002) and Jones' (2002) approach, but arises within the ordinary workings of Christian lives to meet pressing practical needs. For Tanner (2002, p.229 -230), and here she differs from Dykstra and Bass (2002), Christian practices do not require much explicit understanding from believers to inform and explain their performance, neither do they require much agreement from the participants, and often Christian practices are open-ended rather than undefined. Therefore, for Tanner (2002, p.233), through engagement in a critical and reflective way with Christian practice, we are called to be active witnesses to what God has done for us in Christ and to be active disciples. Being witnesses means, through effort-filled deliberation, we can understand what Christianity stands for in our own lives and for our own time and circumstances. It is not simply an immersion in established practices. However, this requires the ever-renewed and renewing of personal and church-specific decisions about how to deepen insights which come through the way of Christian practices and how to make into a coherent whole the various things we believe and how we act as Christians. Moreover, it includes how we are to interact and interrelate with the wider changing world. Therefore, Tanner (2002, p.230) sees Christian practices as the way in which communities of faith define themselves as Christian. This is through both historic Christian practices, as seen in the thoughts of Dykstra and Bass (2002, p.18), and seeing practices that bring about a new purpose and direction for a Christian community.

This leads Tanner (2002, pp.230-233) to see how Christian communities are more open to interpreting how practices should be done in pursuit of God's praxis, rather than being dependant on engaging in certain actions in certain ways. For Tanner (2002, p.233), this leads to a fluid and flexible perception of Christian practices,

accommodating both the reality of the messiness of the social organisational life and engaging in acts that are significant and historically meaningful. Within such a community, theological reflection becomes central and this means that rather than adopting an ‘internal property’ of practices, Christian practices become meaning-making and distinct in the way that Christians understand and act in their activity and relation to the world. Tanner’s (2002) thoughts are important, because she does not discount the place of historical practices but opens and widens the scope for empirical enquiry, rather than towards specific historical reinterpretations. Therefore, as the voices of the practitioners are explored through narratives of practice, we can see that when relationships as communicative acts are held within God’s communicative action as seen through the work of Vanhoozer (2010), they can be adopted as an authentic contemporary practice undergirded and guided by the rigorous thought of both tradition and theology. Relationships as communicative acts move from being guided by the normative voice of the literature on youth ministry, to being guided by the normative voice of Trinitarian theology as communicative action; they move from not *only* having a focus on orthopraxis, but this practice can be informed and enriched by the wider Christian tradition..

Developing a Narrative Approach to Exploring Practice

This third section develops a narrative approach to exploring practice. Moschella (2008, p.49) sees that theology and practice are an intertwined phenomena and we can study practices in the hope of being able to read and see the theology they enact and evoke as well as the values they suggest. With this in mind, the idea of narrative can be used as a framework to help explore the lived experience and voices of the youth ministry practitioners through narratives of practice. The idea of narrative has a long history within practical theology, as Graham et al (2005, p.47-109) argue. Ballard and Pritchard (2006, p.128) see how narrative can be used within a theological hermeneutic of reflection, they argue, by using the fundamental category of narrative which is the primary language of human experience, the process of hermeneutical reflection is able to tap into some of the richest insights available; this resonates with the adopted approach. As Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.38) argue, the telling of stories and the accurate recording, transcription and analysis of this data forms the heart of the qualitative research enterprise. As Punch (2005, p.217) sees, there is a storied character to much qualitative data. Thinking about the stories can

enable us to think creatively about collecting and interpreting data. This enables us to provide a narrative context which is valuable in studying lives and lived experience. This approach to narratives within qualitative research can give a uniquely rich and subtle understanding of life situations which is ideally suited to this research as relationships as communicative acts are explored. Therefore, through exploring practice as narrative, it is possible to argue that each story described, each experience recorded, reveals a different perspective on the particular reality that is being investigated (Swinton and Mowat 2006, p.36). As the experiences and voices of the practitioners are explored and as narratives of practice are developed, these stories and lived experiences, taken together, lead to a closer approximation of what the reality of enacted mission amongst non-churched young people looks like. Interpretations of these stories and enacted mission told by the practitioners, through relationships as communicative acts and the theological shorthand expression of these, are maps of reality which the youth ministers use to interpret and navigate their experience. The use of stories is important in our methodology as it gives an immediate response to the interview questions and reveals an embedded theological position. This is because it eliminates, at least in part, the participants giving what is thought to be the correct and right theological answer. This enabled and revealed a deeper and more real theological expression amongst the messiness and realities of practice.

Insider Research and Reflexivity

As I seek to interpret and describe the practice and theology of the youth ministers through my own theological lens, I do so as an insider. Here, I need to declare that I am a white, middle class male and a Christian. I have been a youth minister and I am currently a Lecturer in Theology and Ministry. Therefore, I inhabit the youth ministry world and I am emotionally involved and connected to and form part of this community of practice. This means that this research forms a piece of insider research³⁷ and interrelates to the subject of reflexivity.

³⁷ Hodkinson (2005, p.131) sees that insider research is when the researcher has an initial subjective proximity in terms of relation to the subjects being researched.

Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.59) argue that reflexivity is not simply a tool for qualitative research but an integral part of what it actually is. Put simply, they see that reflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection which is carried out by the researcher throughout the research process; this enables the researcher to monitor and respond to their contribution to the proceedings. However, it is also central to the theological hermeneutic that encompasses qualitative research within it that we have been developing. This is because it brings to the fore and explicates the epistemological position of the researcher, as noted above. It means that as the voices of the youth ministers are explored, their theology is described and, as this is brought into conversation with the literature on youth ministry and then into further discussion with the normative voice of Trinitarian theology, it is through the lens of my own theology that this happens. Yet, there is a tension here that my own theology, although crucial to the hermeneutical process, should allow the theology of the practitioners to breathe and to be expressed and not to be diminished or distorted. Therefore, reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways my own beliefs, values, experiences and interests shape the research.

The Research Sample and Ethical Considerations

To examine narratives of practice, I adopted a purposive approach in selecting the sample of youth ministry practitioners. As Cohen et al (2007, p.115) see purposive sampling is used to access knowledgeable people and through a purposive approach it is possible to acquire in-depth information from those who are in a position to give it. The participants chosen had in depth knowledge about mission amongst non-churched young people, due to their training and elements of their practice. Therefore, the sample of youth ministers selected offers the best chance of answering the research question. As Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.236) see, purposive sampling has the potential to yield the specific information that is relevant to the project. Before the sample was confirmed, a number of other youth ministers were contacted, but not selected, due to not having explicit elements of their practice that engaged with non-churched young people. Therefore, the sample of youth ministers elected is intentionally small; this facilitates an acute focus (Punch 2005, p.187), and elicits an intensity that allowed a depth of data to be gathered. Through this process a ‘thick’ (Geertz 1973), rich and in-depth description of the enacting of mission amongst

young people is made possible. That said, there are limits to this study. The first is pragmatic, six have been chosen because of the restricted scope of the project due to my time and the amount of data generated by six 30 - 40 minute interviews. With this, I took into account the time needed for the patient and intense analyses needed for this depth of research (Appendix A lays out the interview summary). Secondly, the limits of purposive sampling need to be acknowledged. As Cohen et al (2007, p.115) see, within this approach the sample holds the possibility of not being representative and the participants comments may not be generalisable. I recognise the tension of this within this research. However, generalisability is not the goal for this research and it is still possible for the data to have transferable resonance (Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.47), beyond the voices of the youth ministers interviewed. This may be possible due to the pivotal literature on youth ministry as missional endeavour that both Oasis College and CYM draw upon as explored in Chapter Three. Furthermore transferable resonance may be possible because of how the discipline of youth ministry acts as a community of practice.³⁸

With this in mind and to frame the purposive sample, I intentionally drew from the alumni networks of Oasis College and Centre for Youth Ministry. Through this I made use of personal networks and contacts (Johnson, 1990, p.19).³⁹ The youth ministry practitioners chosen from these networks were white, residents of the UK, and included two woman and four men. They described themselves as evangelical and all had aspects of their practice that involved mission amongst non-churched young people. The participants are introduced at the start of Chapter Two.

With regard to negotiating the ethical issues within qualitative research, Cohen et al (2007, p.382) see that interviews have an ethical dimension as they are concerned with interpersonal interaction and produce information about the human condition. Cohen et al (2007, p.382) identify three main areas of ethical concern; these are: informed consent, confidentiality and the consequences of the interviews. I followed the guidelines laid out by King's College London (KCL) on good practice and data protection. Ethical consent was gained through KCL and the research project was

³⁸ Ward (2008, p.6) by drawing on Wenger, sees that Youth Ministry is a community of practice. Oasis College also adopts this idea to describe the learning environment of its courses and ethos.

³⁹ Johnson (1990) argues that selecting accessing appropriate case studies or interviewees can rely on a researcher's contacts, networks, personal skills and good fortune (Johnson, 1990, p.19). I followed Johnson in selecting the interviewees.

deemed to be ‘low risk’ (ethical approval number: REP(EM)/10/11-2).

Subsequently, each participant was given an information sheet which outlined the research and they each signed a consent form. In terms of confidentiality, neither the participants, nor the projects or the young people mentioned within the research are able to be identified in the final report and pseudonyms are used. The outcomes and proposed benefits of the research will be made available to the participants at the end of the project.

Data Collection and Transcriptions

In seeking to capture the data for investigating the lived experience of youth ministry practitioners and develop narratives of practice, I adopted the informal interview as the appropriate method with prompts when required. Once the interviews were completed and transcribed follow up phone calls were made to clarify any remarks and comments. Moschella (2008, p.66) sees that the qualitative interview⁴⁰ is one of the hallmark methods in research. In line with this, Punch (2005, p.168) argues that the interview is one of the main data collection tools in qualitative research. It is a good way of accessing people’s perceptions, meanings and constructs of reality. It is also one of the most powerful ways of understanding others. Punch (2005, p.168) cites Jones (1985, p.46) to see that, in order to understand other persons’ constructs of reality, we should ask them, and ask them in a way that they might tell us in their own way and language with a depth and richness which addresses the context that is the substance of their meanings. This is what I aimed for in asking for the telling of stories about enacted mission amongst non-churched young people, yet the interviews were not perfect (they seldom are) due to a few interruptions, ringing phones and a kitten! The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and professionally transcribed.

Denzin (1997, p.35) is in agreement with this idea of telling stories, as he sees that the researcher who wishes to understand another has to build up an in depth understanding based on an involvement in the subject’s world of experience. As Wengraf (2001) sees, the interview is about letting the informant talk about their

⁴⁰ For a youth ministry perspective see Baker (2005).

world in their terms; it is a way of finding out someone's unique personal culture, that is, their beliefs, feelings, and values.

Therefore, what is important is to listen to the stories of the six practitioners as they describe the richness and complexities of their work amongst young people, as Moschella (2008, p.18) sees, helping them recall their stories of faith. Within the interview process, Moschella (2008, p.66) argues that the formulating of the interview questions is an important task; one is to think about the tone that is set with the questions and she suggests a few simple open-ended questions that probe current practices and personal stories (See Appendix B for the interview schedule). With the adoption of this technique, it enabled a natural and relaxed flow to the story-telling; it allowed enough space and time so that when a practitioner started a story I could let him or her keep going without interrupting. The questions asked were non-threatening and, as part of the process, I sought to work with and accept the ambiguity and contradictions of situations when they occurred in the participants' stories.

Therefore, and with this in mind, Swinton and Mowat (2006, p. 57) see that the process of analysis begins with the interview but, once captured, needs to be transcribed and then be carefully and patiently analysed. Before all six interviews were undertaken, I carried out a pilot interview to explore and test if the stories a youth minister practitioner told would elicit the in depth information required to answer the research question. This was then transcribed by a professional transcription service and checked against the original recording for internal validity and reliability. The data from the pilot was then analysed through narrative analysis following the work of Labov (1972). This led to two outcomes. Firstly, the story telling approach was successful, the data generated and gathered was formative and held potential for exploring the lived practice of enacted mission amongst non-churched young people of the youth minister interviewed. Secondly, however, the structured narrative analysis approach adopted from Labov's (1972)⁴¹ evaluation model was too limiting and constraining. This particular model of narrative analyses did not enable the data to breathe. Therefore, a different model through the work of Riessman (1993) was adopted. This is the subject now turned to.

⁴¹ Labov's (1972) evaluation model is paradigmatic; most investigators apply it or use it as a point of departure.

Data Analysis

Swinton and Mowat (2005, p.57) note that, put simply, data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, clarity and meaning to the complicated mass of qualitative data that the researcher generates during the research process. The interpretation and reflective work of the researcher function through theoretical sensitivity. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.42) suggest that: 'Theoretical sensitivity refers to the personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data . . . it refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from which isn't.' Swinton and Mowat (2005, p.57) see that this is developed through engagement with the literature and the personal and professional experience of the researcher, through the issues of reflexivity and insider research. Riessman (1993) sees that during research interviews, interviewees will often hold the floor for long periods of time and organise their answers into stories.

Therefore, as the six practitioners were interviewed, it is possible to see how they order and tell their experiences through story and why they remember and retell what they do. The structuring of experience through story can hence be analysed through meanings and motives. This makes narrative analysis a particularly powerful approach in seeking to interpret the data we have captured and in developing narratives of practice that express relationships as communicative acts. As Riessman (1993, p.5) argues, narrative analysis has to do with interpreting situations. Thus, it fits well within the interpretive paradigm and complements the critical hermeneutic found within practical theology, discussed above. Because it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and gives prominence to human agency and imagination, it becomes a strong framework for exploring situations in great detail, that are rooted in a certain time and place and that are perspective-ridden and grounded in personal experience. As Riessman (1993) argues, stories tell us not only about past actions but also, importantly for this thesis, how individuals understand those actions and their meaning. This echoes with Browning's (1996) and Graham's (1996) work on theory-laden practice which is explored above and enables the lived practice of the youth ministry practitioners to be seen through relationships as communicative acts and as theological shorthand.

This method of 'narrative analysis' drawn from Riessman (1993), shaped and formed the foundations for the data analysis. To investigate the actions and practice of the youth ministers and their meaning, required the investigation of themes that are developed, and found in the stories told by the youth ministry practitioners. Here, the informal interview questions formed the frame, and the stories told provide the colour, texture and form of the theological picture. Once the data had been transcribed, I read and re-read the transcriptions, beginning to live and breathe the data; through this process the data was themed. This was carried out manually across the stories, using coloured pens to identify the research question-related material, and then grouped into descriptive themes. This is a patient investigation of the process of relationships within enacted youth ministry. The tension here was to hold on to the stories told, but also to use the themes developed to identify the meanings and action held with them. By studying the sequence of stories in an interview, and the thematic and linguistic connections between them, I could identify how the individual youth ministers tied together significant events within their practice. As a mode of analysis, I then identified segments of the stories that held together these themes. This resonates with Seidel and Kelle (1995, pp.55-56) who argue that we attach themes as a way of identifying key ideas within the data, allowing the data to be thought about in new and different ways. Here, the gathering of descriptive themes from across the stories the youth ministers told became the subtle art and process of having ideas and working with the data; it became the link between the raw data and stories within the interview transcripts and my theoretical concepts. This, then, became both data reduction and data complication. As Straus (1987) sees, themes become about the conceptualising of data, raising questions and providing provisional answers about the information within the data in relation to the research question. Here, the data is opened up to enquiry and a move towards interpretation is made. It becomes about investigating the data, investigating the actions and meanings that are expressed in Riessman's (1993) thinking. Therefore, the themes followed the reading of the data and the stories the youth ministry practitioners told, a moving between these modes. It is the discovery of particular events, stories and embodied practice of how the youth ministers enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. This led to key words, themes and ideas that capture the essence of the enacted mission in relation to their stories of practice. These become

heuristic devices for discovery (Seidel and Kelle 1995), providing ways of interacting and thinking about the data.

As this is a piece of insider research, these key themes have been shaped by my knowledge of the field and can be found within the youth ministry literature as explored in Chapter Three. However, as these themes have acted as heuristic devices for discovery, ideas have been pushed in new directions as I interacted, engaged, investigated and moved between the stories within the data.

The four descriptive themes are as follows:

- Relationships
- Like Jesus
- Being there
- Time and journey

These four themes and the interpretive patterns developed from them act as headlines that shape the structure for Chapters Two, Three and Four. As the data is analysed, how the six interviewees use these four interrelated themes to describe their enacted mission amongst non-churched young people is explored. Moreover, these four descriptive themes lead to a set of inferred themes. These interrelated interpretive patterns have inference beyond the data, whilst remaining linked to the descriptive themes found in the stories told, this is illustrated in Table A:

Table A

Key Descriptive themes	Inferred themes
Relationships	Communicative acts and Transmission
Like Jesus	Model
Being There	Symbol
Time and Journey	Liminal Space

Furthermore, how the descriptive and inferred themes relate to the individual youth ministers in the data set is laid out in Table B. This table shows how the themes were either described within the data, i.e. the word was actually used or can be inferred from the data gathered.

Table B

Theme	Youth Ministers					
	Andrew	David	Jill	Mark	Tom	Rachel
Relationships						
Descriptive	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Inferred			✓			✓
Connection						
Descriptive	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Inferred						✓
Transmission						
Inferred	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
As Communicative Acts						
Inferred	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Like Jesus						
Like		✓		✓	✓	
Example	✓			✓		✓
Mirror		✓				
Look	✓				✓	
See			✓			
As Model						
Inferred	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Being There						
Descriptive			✓			
Inferred	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
As Symbol						
Inferred	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time and Journey						
Time						
Descriptive	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Inferred						✓
Journey						
Descriptive	✓		✓		✓	
Inferred		✓		✓		✓
As Liminal Space						
Inferred	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

How the descriptive and inferred themes relate to traditional Christian practices is laid out in Table C.

Table C

Descriptive themes	Inferred themes	Traditional Christian Practice
Relationships	Communicative acts and Transmission	<i>Marturia</i>
Like Jesus	Model	<i>Marturia and Diakonia</i>
Being There	Symbol	<i>Diakonia</i>
Time and Journey	Liminal Space	<i>Marturia and Diakonia</i>

This Chapter has set out a practical theological methodology that correlates the voices of the practitioners, the youth ministry literature and the normative voice of Trinitarian theology. To do this, qualitative research has been accommodated within a theological hermeneutic and situated within an appropriate cycle of reflection. This shapes the hermeneutical journey of this thesis. The shape of Christian practices has been investigated and how theology provides the normative voice for practice has been discussed. Furthermore, a narrative framework has been developed for interpreting youth ministry as relationships as communicative acts through the creation of narratives of practice. In Chapter Two the data within narratives of practice and the voices of the practitioners is interpreted as the theme of relationships as communicative acts and the theological shorthand expression of this is explored and presented. This is the subject that is examined next.

CHAPTER TWO:

NARRATIVES OF PRACTICE: EXPLORATION AND PRESENTATION

As relationships as communicative acts are explored through the voices of the practitioners, the voice of the youth ministry literature and within the voice of Trinitarian theology, this chapter investigates, interprets and presents the voices of the youth ministers through narratives of practice and examines and analyses the qualitative data gathered through the interview process. This is the second step in the reflection cycle adopted from the methodology provided by Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.96). As explored earlier, the aim of this phase is to gain new insights into practice and the way youth ministers enact mission amongst non-churched young people.

The Youth Ministers

Andrew

Andrew is employed at a large evangelical Baptist church within a leafy commuter town and has grown up and come to faith within the Baptist tradition. He trained with Oasis and Andrew's practice covers a rich variety of ministry with young people; including work within schools, mentoring, the YMCA and the Princes Trust (Andrew, 16-20). His practice also includes facilitating the church groups on a Sunday morning and evening for young people aged 11 – 18, running a youth led worship service, facilitating eight small discipleship groups and overseeing a Friday night outreach group for young people on the fringes of the church community. The stories that are told as part of this research are about his involvement and mission amongst non-churched young people connected to the Friday evening group. Here, the focus was not on a talk or an epilogue, but on relationships and conversations with a particular group of lads and their friends. The Friday night club provided an opportunity for the leaders and volunteers to get alongside the young people through football, pool and table tennis. This led to informal meetings and activities outside of these sessions and also facilitated the involvement of the young people in the shaping of programme.

David

David works for a large evangelical Baptist Church in a leafy suburb of London and he came to faith through the Baptist tradition. David trained with Oasis and as a youth minister in a large evangelical church he is involved in a number of different projects. Like Andrew, Mark and Tom this involves the facilitating of the Sunday morning and evening groups for young people, a number of small discipleship groups and youth led worship services. In addition to these, David works on a number of cross town projects including a social action and worship project, inspired by the Soul Survivor event Soul in the City, in 2004. He is also heavily involved in Street and College Pastors. The stories told for this research focus on the afterschool drop in. David (15-16) estimated that up to 90-95% of young people who come to this had no other contact with the Baptist church or other churches within the town. The drop in revolves around BMX and skate ramps especially purchased for the space, a place to do homework through a networked computer suite, Xbox, Playstation and Unihoc. Other activities include helping to write CV's, cooking and craft (David, 20-28). Again, like Andrew, relationships, conversations and coming alongside young people are seen as central (David, 29).

Jill

Jill currently works for a large evangelical Anglican Church in London and is the full time employed youth minister. Jill trained with CYM and grew up and came to faith within the Baptist tradition. Before her training with CYM, Jill worked for an ecumenical detached youth project with a focus on very vulnerable and marginalised young people. Within her current role as a youth minister and her previous work for a church in the Midlands, Jill had aspects of her practice that centred on work amongst non-churched young people, and she drew on this experience to talk about and tell stories of her mission amongst young people. However, the focus within this research is on her work at a drop in youth club. Before this youth club opened, Jill and her team carried out detached work for three to four months and this led to the opening of the provision. Like Andrew, David and Mathew, the drop in does not have an explicit Christian message or a Biblical talk, but the focal point is on the relational and conversations around table tennis and games of pool, cooking activities and craft. The group is well resourced by a team of volunteers who were all

Christians (Jill, 70-71). Moreover, Jill also instigated an IT project with a range of laptops and had volunteers available to help with homework, C.V. writing and applying for jobs. Like Rachel, Jill's mission amongst non-churched young people often goes well beyond the detached work and the drop in, this involved going to meetings with the local council and attending a drug prevention charity with a young person and her mother around drug use.

Mark

Mark works for Oasis within a difficult urban area and he came to faith within the Baptist tradition. He trained with CYM and his current ministry is concentrated on three overlapping projects. These include a drop in, after school clubs, and detached work with non-churched young people. Interrelated to these, Mark's practice also includes a particular focus amongst young people who are involved with gangs and violent crime. Mark (34) described his previous role as a youth minister (shared between a church and para-church organisation) as being 'very open'. This meant he could be open about his faith within the schools where he worked, as his team were known as Christians and could talk freely about their beliefs. With the work at Oasis, Mark (36-37) sees this as less 'in your face' and this more relational and conversational style of ministry, fitted 'who he was'. He saw his ministry in terms of holistic transformation, moving young people from low aspirations to have a hope and dream for the future (47-48). Furthermore, Mark (49-50) saw this ministry as being in line with the wider ethos of inclusion that Oasis has developed and that shapes the work within the Academies and Hubs. It is the detached work and his work with gangs that become the focus for this piece.

Rachel

Rachel works for a para-church organisation in a leafy medium size town. She trained with Oasis and throughout this training Rachel worked for a Baptist church. She has grown up and come to faith within this large evangelical church. Rachel (24-29) identifies the centre of this ministry as being amongst the young people who came to church and their friends. Here, like David, Mark and Andrew, the focus was on the Sunday and morning and evening groups, small group discipleship, youth led worship and activity days for young people. Before this, Rachel had also been involved with a Community Trust that worked on a very difficult estate in London

with non-churched young people. This involved a lot of work with young adults and older young people. Her current ministry is amongst non-churched young people on two local estates. Here, four projects are run including detached work and a drop in. The work takes place on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings with young people up to the age of 18, however, some of the support work continues into early adulthood. The work on the other estate takes place twice a week (Wednesday and Friday), again the target is 11-18 year olds, but the focus is amongst a group of difficult young men (14-16 year olds) and a few girls who are also part of this group. As Rachel told stories of her work amongst non-churched young people she drew on her experience of working with the Community Trust, the work amongst the non-churched friends of the young people within the Baptist church and her current ministry.

Tom

Tom is employed full time as a youth minister for a large Evangelical Anglican Church within a leafy suburb of London. He trained with Oasis and came to faith through the Anglican tradition. As a youth minister in a large evangelical Church, his ministry is rich and varied. It involves: facilitating the Church groups on a Sunday morning and evening, a youth led worship service, small discipleship groups, a Friday night youth club and mentoring within schools. Furthermore, he also facilitates and runs three interrelated projects. These are a football project, an afterschool drop in and a youth cafe. The youth cafe is a partnership project with a para-church organisation. The cafe project was set up to provide a space to meet young people in a place away from the church. The cafe is located in a local parade of shops that had become a focus for the police after some trouble with young people who gathered in large groups. It is the interrelated ministry of the schools work, the football project, the after school drop in and the cafe that are the particular focus for this research. This correlation of projects is important for Tom (46) as they provide a way of meeting with young people at different points in their week. Like Mark, he sought to work without an agenda seeking instead to go into schools and ask 'what value can I bring to your school, how can I help? Like Andrew and Mark his focus is on developing relationships and holding conversations at different stages of the young people's faith journey (Tom, 23-31).

Now the context of the practitioners has been set and following the practical theological methodology described in Chapter One, the interpretative journey begins by the development of the key themes within the data. Therefore, relationships are affirmed as an overarching theme expressed by the practitioners. These operate as communicative acts as connection and transmission and are the threads that run through the stories told. Relationships as communicative acts are seen to influence young people and help youth ministers connect with them. However, this multifaceted practice is summed up through the language of relationship, like Jesus, being there and time and journey; this is seen as theological shorthand. The theological shorthand exposes an embedded theology that evokes the wider theological picture of the Christian tradition, yet, this wider tradition is not overtly articulated.

Moreover, as the theme of relationships as communicative acts runs through the narratives, then like Jesus can be seen as the theme that the others revolve around. Like Jesus as model is how our youth minister practitioners enact mission amongst non-church young people. The third theme of being there is the enacted presence of the second like Jesus and becomes an enacted theological moment in time and space through which the youth ministers act as a 'symbol' (Tillich 1962). As a 'symbol', they embody qualities of that which they participate in, what they point towards, however, this is not expressed - only the language of model is articulated and is seen as being like Jesus. As 'symbols' youth ministers, through being there, are meaningful on account of their relationship to Christ. Therefore, it is an act of embodied faith that points towards and models Christ and seeks to be like Jesus. Like Jesus and being there is carried, transmitted and given direction and shape through the web of connections made in the relationships established. But this takes time and is a journey. Through this fourth theme of time and journey, liminal spaces are created. These liminal spaces are places where relationships as communicative acts through being there take place; it is the space where being like Jesus is enacted. This is what the practitioners strive for in their enacted mission. These are places of transition, a place of threshold, of waiting and not knowing, places of movement, frustration and life. Within this liminal space, there is an interweaving between the themes, relationships, being there and like Jesus, as all take time and this is either explicit or it is implied through the idea of journey and is an embodied

communicative act of faith by the youth ministry practitioners in a series of encounters with young people. Furthermore, through relationships as communicative acts there is a focus on right action (*orthopraxis*), on performing a function, it evokes and has a connection to a deeper set of 'right' beliefs (*orthodoxy*) from the Christian Tradition, yet this is not overtly articulated. Therefore, there is an association with the traditional church practices of *marturia* and *diakonia* and in a very limited way, evokes the practice of *kerygma*, but these are collapsed into the expression of relationships and is explored further in Chapters Three and Four.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Connection and Transmission

Within the narratives told by the youth ministry practitioners, David, Andrew, Tom, Mark are explicit about the theme of relationships, whilst for Rachel and Jill the relationships are implicit and implied. Yet, within all the narratives expressed, the implicit and implied act of relationship acted as theological shorthand, a way of summing up the complexities and nuances of enacted practice. Within the theme of relationship, the language of construction is discovered, relationships are built, (Tom, 35, 53,163; Andrew, 39, 90; David, 85,132,134,135,193) and connections made (David, 54, Andrew, 14). However, relationships also have a softer way of being expressed through the notion of sharing of lives (Andrew, 43, 79, 147, 219; Tom, 164; Mark, 27, 107, 147,237; Rachel, 318; Jill, 27). This is an interconnected theme which is explored below through being there. Moreover, within the theme of relationships, the relationships that are built and the connections made transmit the faith and these can be seen as circuits of influence and the place of sub-cultural engagement. Relationships can be seen to function as communicative acts as the enacted mission amongst non-churched young people and encompass the traditional church practices of *marturia* and *diakonia*. The idea of relationships as communicative act as a place of connection and transmission is seen in Andrew's articulation of enacted mission. These ideas are present in the way being there and the sharing of lives (Andrew, 43) function as a place of connection between himself and the young people and as a place for the transmission of his faith. In the verbalising of Andrews's relationships with young people, he used the term connections (Andrew, 14, 39) and he also uses the term build, articulating that you need to get to know young people and build a relationship with them (Andrew, 39). For Andrew (41-43), he sought to enact mission through this process and through

various interactions he aimed to share and communicate something of his life and faith as a Christian.

Furthermore, David (85), also articulates this notion of having to build relationships and he sees this as central to the forming and creation of trust between himself and young people. This term built (David, 134,135) ties into the idea of relationship as a place of connection; moreover, it evokes a sense of time and the idea journey. These are strong themes within the data and will be explored in more depth below. The idea of relationships as a place of connection that is built is also articulated through how Mark (158) expressed himself as a minister who functions like a bridge. Here, this core theme of relationship is seen as a metaphorical bridge, a place of connection, connecting the minister's life to that of the young person. Furthermore, for Mark (164-165), the relationship leads to how influence is gained through the level of respect and trust they have for the minister, resonating with the thoughts of David (134 -135). Therefore, for Mark, relationships are seen as a place, not only of connection, but of transmission that can carry the ideas and faith of the minister as influence as they seek to connect with young people and have moral sway evoking the practice of *marturia*. Pivoting around this place of connection, Mark (249-253) articulates how these relationships go beyond the sessions the ministers are involved in and this means being there for young people. Therefore, relationships as a place of connection is expressed as being there through the creation of time and this can be seen as intentional (Tom, 179-180). This is seen through how both Mark and Tom articulate the central place of relationships in terms of their practice:

Mark (287-288): *'if the relationship isn't at the heart of it and you haven't got time for someone, then you need to create time and if it's outside of the session that's fine - we can sort it'*

Tom (14, 23, 30, 32): *'in my practice I have a very strong emphasis on building relationships . . . in an unlimited amount of spheres . . . seeking to communicate who Jesus is at various different stages in the young people's faith journey'*

Therefore, for both Mark (287) and Tom (14, 23, 30-32), relationships occupy a central place and are seen as the way in which they can engage with young people. There is intentionality about these relationships in order to help young people articulate and think about their faith. For Tom (185-186) it's not just about

relationships for relationships sake, but these have a purpose of communicating faith and seeing the young people's lives transformed by Jesus. Here then, in a similar way to Mark above, the relationship acts as the place of intentional connection and a place of transmission through which the faith of the youth minister can be demonstrated. Therefore, the role of relationship as connection and transmission becomes a place of sub-cultural engagement; the relationships act as circuits of influence that seek to connect the differing worlds of adults and young people (Tom 53-59). This resonates with Mark's idea of a bridge; however, these connections take place over a period of time and as a journey. This demonstration of faith that is built and carried through time and through journey is discovered within the relationship (Tom, 34). Therefore, it leads Tom to run groups which are all about building relationships (Tom, 35). This is echoed in David's thoughts and here again faith is communicated and embodied by the relationship and this takes place through the notion of being there and caring for the young person, resonating with the practice of *marturia* and *diakonia*. The relationships are seen as places of connection to carry and transmit the message of faith; relationships function as communicative acts that seek to make faith relevant and act as a place of sub-cultural engagement. This is also found in Jill's expression of enacting mission amongst non-churched young people and it is possible to see Jill's relationships as a form of connection and as a communicative act amongst young people. However, the actual term of relationship is not as explicit as in the language and expression of Andrew, David, Tom and Mark, but it is implicit within the work and ministry that she is involved in. The sense of relationships as communicative acts as a connection is seen in both Jill's and David's expression:

Jill (16-17, 30) '*just by going where they are*' . . . '*I have found myself sitting on a bench . . . in the winter in the freezing cold*' . . . '*and it seems to be there where they really poured their heart out*'.

David (86-89) '*Christianity is so foreign that actually it needs to be introduced in a different type of way, through connections, through relationships, just by caring really for people.*'

For both Jill and David, this relational practice, as communicative act, as connection seeks to transmit and demonstrate their embodied and lived faith. It is shown in how

both Jill and David begin to articulate the sense of suffering the young people felt. Furthermore, for Jill, it is the relationship that acted as the connection and that transmitted the message and enabled her to articulate and speak about a God who has the possibility to change things (Jill, 175). Additionally, in the expression of Tom, Andrew, Mark, David and Jill the term relationship sums up this complex and nuanced practice of relationships as communicative act and can be seen as theological shorthand for the embodied communication of faith amongst non-churched young people. It encompasses the traditional practices of *marturia*, *diakonia* and, in a very limited way, evokes the practice of *kerygma*.

Tensions within Connection and Transmission

However, relationships and the connections made were not seen as unproblematic and Rachel, Tom and Andrew articulated some of the problems associated with relationships in the enacting of mission amongst non-churched young people. Rachel (92 -93) sees that a relationship with a young person can be very challenging to keep up and when this finishes it is very difficult. Therefore, Rachel (294 - 296) sees, in terms of relationships, that youth ministers are not taught about incomplete stories. Here, within Rachel's thinking, relationships are seen in terms of a story being expressed and worked out but, when these stories (relationships) end, they are particularly painful for the minister. Rachel struggled with the fact that perhaps she should have brought things to a completion and that she may have let the young people down. Within her practice, relationships are a place of connection where young people can express their struggles and suffering (Rachel, 296) and are a means to communicate and transmit her faith. Yet, there is also a personal cost to these relationships for, when they seem incomplete, when the connections are broken, it is painful for the youth minister. Consequently, it is possible to see here the genuineness of the connections made within Rachel's (317-322) relationship with young people due to the emotional investment made and how costly this intentional activity can be.

Furthermore, Tom also expresses this sense of frustration and sadness when the relationship with a young person can end and the place of connection can finish. It again pivots around this concept of investing in and building relationships. Tom (162-165) sees that through relationships with young people he has shared some very

challenging times, times when they have struggled and have been suffering and he has become part of their lives. Here the issue of suffering is raised again, but the tension for Tom is found when young people reach the 'end', due to age (year nine), of an open youth club that has been relationally based. Within this particular aspect of Tom's practice, there is no explicit time to speak about God and he needed to bridge the gap between this relational way of working to a more formal and structured group (Tom, 166 -168). Subsequently, Tom expresses a limit to how relationships as communicative acts as a place of connection that can transmit faith can function, as he seeks a more directed and formal means to enact mission and communicate his faith amongst non-churched young people.

Likewise, Andrew had also wrestled and reflected on the tension of using relationships as a place of connection and method of transmission in the enacting of mission. Andrew (103-105) says that he had been taught:

'that relational youth work was about, from a Christian perspective, was trying to get young people to the point of becoming Christians and as much as I wanted that to happen, I felt like a car salesman trying to sell Christianity, trying to get people to buy into Christianity'.

This has led to a tension that Andrew articulates by knowing that youth work should be relational due to his training and the expression of relationships within the youth ministry literature and to a certain amount of scepticism as to what was happening in that relationship (Andrew, 110-112). Here Andrew is highlighting a problem that exists within the enacted practice of relationships as communicative acts as connection and transmission, the sense that sometimes these can feel forced and unnatural, the sense that although relationships function as a place of communicative acts as connection and the place of transmission, they may not always be enough.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Like Jesus

The next interrelated theme: like Jesus can be seen as pivotal in the enacted practice of the youth ministers. The youth ministers model and base their actions on being like Jesus. This theme, like that of being there and time and journey, is carried and transmitted through relationships as communicative acts and the connections the youth ministers made with non-churched young people. Again, the theme of like

Jesus acts as theological shorthand, a relatively uncomplicated theological expression of the complexities of working and enacting mission amongst non-churched young people, yet, it resonates with the practice of *marturia*.

In the data this is articulated in the following ways by the practitioners:

Tom (85) '*if you look at Jesus*', Tom (99-102) '*to be like Jesus*'; Rachel (153) '*the example Jesus set*'; Andrew (73) '*I look to the New Testament and the example Jesus sets*'; David (165) '*I seek to try and mirror God's 'image', to be like Jesus*'; Jill (239) '*sees that Jesus built relationships*'; and Mark (22,277) '*I want to be an example of Christ*' and to be '*like Jesus*'.

To examine and investigate in more detail the lived theology held in these terms of look, example, mirror and see, the idea of model, of being like Jesus needs to be explored. As this is investigated, the paradox between the complexity and nuances of practice and the theological shorthand description of this is illuminated.

Tom (85 -87) expresses the sense that Jesus spent a lot of time with his disciples and invested in them; here, Tom seeks to model and be with young people in the same way that Jesus did by spending time with them. Moreover, there is again an interrelating and correlation of the themes, by seeking to be like Jesus, Tom sees that time spent with young people is important and, through this time spent, the relationship is built. For Tom (99-102) being like Jesus and spending time with young people leads to the young people knowing that they are valued and, through this expression of time and being like Jesus, they have value to God. Through this process, it is possible to see how, for Tom, being there acts as a 'symbol' that points and directs young people to the value God has for them, a theme explored in more depth below. Rachel (152-153) also articulates how this sense of value is important and she makes the link between how value can be seen in the example Jesus set. For Rachel, this is in the way Jesus is seen to make friends with those who are outcasts and on the margins of society. The example of being like Jesus becomes a guiding principle for her ministry, yet, she is honest in seeing the theological limitations of this as a framework that underpins her practice. Therefore, Rachel (157), expressed a tension between the limits of her theology and the outworking of her practice and there is a tension between her theological understanding and the lived experience and reality of working amongst young people, especially when difficult issues are faced

and the boundaries become blurred. Rachel (159-160) needed to wrestle between what she believed the Bible was teaching and a particular pastoral situation she was facing.

This is articulated through how Rachel (198-204) expressed the nuances of enacted practice as she told a story of how two young people had begun sleeping together. For Rachel (208), this situation involves theological wrestling as she seeks to use the model provided by being like Jesus to understand a very complicated pastoral situation. Jill (244-245) also seeks to use the model provided by being like Jesus, as she seeks to bring a young person back into community because of her understanding of how Jesus worked with those on the margins. Moreover, Tom (230-233) also makes a direct link to the Gospels and his practice resonates with Rachel, Jill, David, Andrew and Mark. Yet Tom is more explicit in seeing that he constructs a theology around his practice and he derives this directly from looking at the example Jesus set as he seeks to be like Jesus in his relationships with young people. However, Tom like Rachel wrestles with the tensions and limits of this. The stories involve issues of inclusion, exclusion and young people on the margins, but, importantly they have a focus on orthopraxis and express the practice of *marturia*.

The tension is seen as Rachel (235-245) expresses the thought that:

‘Jesus, like totally welcomed everybody, and I am trying to tallying that, with the fact that Jesus, you know the story in the Gospels, where Jesus allowed the rich man to walk away - it is so difficult to get the balance between saying you are welcome here and we love you, but your behaviour is not according to what you say you agree with’.

For Jill (244-253): *‘this is kind of where I am at, that’s my passion, to bring those that were out of community back into it and it’s the same for Lily, you know, she was permanently on the outside of community, but through a trip and conversations, she was brought back, they feel a part of things. Just like the woman in the Gospels who is bleeding and as she is healed is brought back into community’*

For Tom, (240-243): *‘I think there is a real danger of doing that with Jesus, that you kind of always focus on the ‘woman at the well’ and that kind of story, you forget that actually, no sometimes he did (Jesus) . . He did challenge and he did speak up*

and he didn't just allow people to just get on with whatever they were doing and whatever. I think there's a danger you go too far the other way'

These stories narrate complex pastoral situations, and the Gospel stories are a deep resource for dealing with the nuances of pastoral practice, but the language of model and like Jesus in Rachel's enacted practice becomes limited for such an example. The move made from this complex pastoral practice to the story of the rich young man raises question of how Rachel's theology informs and illuminates practice. The richness of embodied faith is also seen in Jill's practice as she seeks to work with Lily. Like Rachel she looks to the Gospels to see the example that Jesus sets as she seeks to be like Jesus and like Rachel she, connects this complex pastoral situation to one of her favourite Gospel stories. In both Rachel and Jill's thoughts the idea of like Jesus can be seen as theological shorthand, as like Jesus operates as a phrase for seeking to express the complexities of the pastoral situations faced in the light of their understanding of certain Gospel stories.

However, Tom begins to express the limitations, tensions and potential problems around making simple and straightforward links between the Gospels and the complexity of practice. Furthermore, David (164-65) again uses the language of being like Jesus and again makes a direct link between his practice and the Gospels. David expresses this through how as Christians we seek to be disciples, we try to mirror God's image and to be more like Jesus. For David's (68) enacted mission this is embodied through the need to care for young people and echoes the thoughts of Mark, Jill, Tom, and Rachel.

Likewise, David (70) makes a direct link between his enacted practice and the model of being like Jesus. In this David conveys and makes the explicit link between how he sees that Jesus was very interested in people's physical, mental and spiritual needs. He expresses how this is so interrelated and then makes a move to how he held a holistic view of young people (David, 61). Therefore, like Rachel, Andrew, Tom, Jill, Mark – David made a direct link between how he perceived Jesus treated people and how he treated and cared for young people in his enacted mission. Again like Jesus is used as theological shorthand to sum up the complexities of enacted practice and resonates with the practices of *marturia* and *diakonia*.

Like Jesus and the Incarnation

That said, a richer and deeper theological description of practice is given by Mark. Nonetheless, this still revolves around the idea of model and Mark (27) seeks to transform young people's lives through being a living example. Within this idea, Mark (270) uses the word *incarnational* to describe his enacted mission and he sees this as being like Jesus. For Mark (277), the key is spending time with people, like Jesus did with his disciples. For Mark (271-272), Jesus as an example and model leads to questions that help enact his mission amongst non-churched young people. These questions help shape and orientate his practice and he articulates this by asking how did Jesus live and what did he do? This leads Mark to articulate the importance of how Jesus lived amongst and shared his life with people. Therefore, for Mark (276), it is the sharing of lives that is important. Again, the notion of being like Jesus pivots around the interrelating themes of relationships, being there and time (281) and is worked out in Mark's practice as communicative acts.

In addition to the idea of being like Jesus and Jesus as a model, Mark (24) saw himself as embodying Christ within his practice. This is a rich, enacted theology and Mark (79-80) saw his mission amongst non-churched young people, not in terms of young people becoming Christians, but about realigning them to what God created them to be. Within this practice is a rich theology, but again it is in theological shorthand. The language of *incarnation* points to a deep theology of who God is. This is a God willing to locate himself in time and space amongst humanity in Christ, the God who crosses boundaries. This is worked out in the practice of Mark as he crosses boundaries to work amongst very difficult young people. But this complex, nuanced and skilled practice is encapsulated in the short hand expression of *incarnation* and resonates with Rachel's and Jill's thoughts above in how the language of example and being like Jesus is still the language of observation and of a spectator. However, Mark (27) sees himself, through being a living example, as a facilitator for the work of God and this goes beyond the articulated expression in Rachel's, Jill's and David's practice. The use of the word facilitator is important, and the language of facilitator moves toward ideas of participation in God. This articulation of a deeper expression of theology is also found in Andrew. However, Andrew (73) also articulates the idea of example. For Andrew, when he looks at the New Testament Jesus, he sees Jesus as an example, sharing life together with people.

It helps Andrew to understand how people are important and are not just a project; therefore, for Andrew (79-81), seeing the example Jesus set leads him to share and communicate his faith.

Andrew (82-84) articulates this by looking at how Jesus sought to do this, as he seeks to be like Jesus. Here, Andrew (118) expresses how you can journey with young people and crucially he sees that perhaps God is involved and within the relationship (124) and that the Holy Spirit is at work doing more than he can comprehend (125,126). Therefore, there is a link here between the language of example and model to a deeper theological expression of practice, that God is present. This language evokes what it means to participate in God and the sense that God is involved in the relationship is profound and has a deep theological reality that seems, at least in part, to inform Andrew's enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. The articulation of this stands in contrast to Tom, David, Jill and Rachel but resonates with Mark's thoughts above.

Relationship as Communicative Acts: Being There

The third theme of being there is the enacted presence of the second, like Jesus, and becomes an enacted theological moment in time and space through which the youth ministers act as 'symbols'. As a 'symbol', they embody the qualities of what they point towards and participate in, but this is articulated through the language of model, of being like Jesus as seen above. As 'symbols' youth ministers, through being there, are meaningful on account of their relationship to Christ. Therefore, it is an act of embodied faith that points towards Christ and seeks to be like Jesus. The expression of the theme of being there is seen in the interrelatedness of this and the others that have been explored so far. Being there as 'symbol' is the theological shorthand expression of pastoral care and the coming alongside young people who are suffering and in very difficult situations. Being there is carried through relationships as communicative acts in the way the youth ministers made connections with young people and it is how their faith is transmitted and communicated. To be like Jesus is modelled over time and through the narrative structure of journey. There is a direct correlation between how the youth ministry practitioners see their practice and the life of Jesus and how he responded to people.

This is embodied through the theme of being there and again has a focus on orthopraxis and resonates with the practice of *diakonia*.

Being there for Jill (44) involved her coming alongside young people who were having a very difficult time and working amongst them. She illustrates this by recalling a moment with young people in which she sat with them in the rain for over an hour and Jill explicitly expressed this as being there for them as she listened to their problems and troubles at home. The theme of being there resonates through Jill's practice and finds acute expression in a story Jill (83-93) told about a young person called Lily who is mentioned above. Jill describes Lily's life as life in the midst of suffering and how this played out through drink and drugs. Yet, by fostering a relationship and being there with Lily, Jill began to get to know the complexity of the problems that Lily was facing (Jill, 98-101). Jill (107), through conversations and over a period of time, worked with Lily and Lily came to the point when she decided to give up drugs.

Through this intervention, Jill (108-112) put Lily in touch with a drug rehabilitation centre. From this point, Jill (120-123) was able to sort out a place in a childcare nursery and Lily became involved in some work experience and went on to attend college. For Jill, being there for this young girl over a period of time led to a transformation of her life through the relationship established. Moreover, for Jill, being there, this coming amongst and being with young people in the midst of suffering is theological shorthand for the complexities of practice, for being like Jesus and communicating the deeper realities of who God is and how he loves, cares and has compassion for people (Jill, 135). Being there acts as a 'symbol' that points to who God is. Furthermore, Jill (149-154) articulates a cost to being there when beginning to express how important the relationship was within this story:

'I think, with young people, if you're not willing to start it, then don't . . . if you are not willing to be there, in it for the long haul, then don't do it. Because actually you can't help a young person, get started and walk away.'

Within these thoughts there is a correlation with the other theme of time and journey, as being there and the time taken with Lily was crucial in turning her life around. What's more, Jill articulates her mission amongst non-churched young people, not in terms of young people coming to faith, but in her work amongst them in difficult

situations and helping them in very practical ways (Jill, 154-160). However, this revolves around the overarching theme of relationship as communicative acts and is enacted through being there and being like Jesus. For Jill, being there was such an important part of her mission amongst non-churched young people that she was willing to go beyond what was expected of her in her role as youth minister. Consequently, it was through this willing to be there for Lily and the other young people for the long haul that led her to communicate aspects of her faith and how she began to see change.

There are echoes within Jill's story of how Tom (104) saw his care reflecting and pointing to how God cares for people that is mentioned above. The idea of 'symbol' finds expression through care and being there and is articulated in a story Tom told about his enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. Tom articulates how he worked alongside two girls and how one of the girls was suffering and facing a very challenging time. This was not an issue that Tom had dealt with alone, the vicar had been involved and so had the previous youth minister. The previous youth minister had met them in a local coffee shop, so Tom (288-296) adopted this practice. The story of Tom's work amongst these young people pivots around a difficult situation with the group he was working with. The situation involved a demanding young person who needed one-to-one support and the girl Tom (320-334) had been working alongside had expressed an interest in helping others. Within Tom's enacted mission alongside this girl, the practice of being there was expressed. This is demonstrated through being connected, (Tom, 334) through relationship, and Tom was able to work with this girl who was from a marginalised position on the edge of a community to her being brought into and given a place within that community. This is similar to how Jill saw her enacted practice with a desire to bring people back into community which has been explored above. For Tom the complexity of this practice, like Jill's, can be seen as theological shorthand, as it is summed up through the straightforward expression of being there. Here, Tom acts as a 'symbol' which points towards a God who cares and has compassion and this is demonstrated and lived out in the actual practice of care and concern of being there for this young girl, resonating with the practice of *diakonia*. Moreover, we can see how the other theme of time and journey reverberates through this narrative and shapes this practice.

The theme of being there and the compassion demonstrated in the practice of Jill and Tom also echoes within David's enacted mission. For David, being there has a very practical outworking. In David's practice, this is illustrated by a story he told of a young woman. This story locates David's idea of mission in a similar vein to Jill's and Tom's; likewise, it is not only about people coming to faith, but also how that mission is the outworking and expression of practical care, concern and love; therefore, like Jill and Tom this has an emphasis on orthopraxis. Furthermore, this is transmitted and carried through the building of connections and through relationships as communicative acts. This is embodied in being there in the midst of the suffering and is rooted in David's understanding of how Jesus related to people.

David (46-53) expresses this through his support of a girl who became pregnant which created enormous tensions within the family. For David (69-70), being there for this girl and the support he gave her finds direct correlation with the person of Jesus. David articulates this by seeing that Jesus often looked after somebody's physical needs before he talked about the kingdom of God. Here again is an intertwining of the themes. Being there acts as the theological shorthand expression for the complexities of practice and this is embodied in very practical care and concern, but this theological shorthand in the lived practice of Jill and Tom and David acts through the youth minister being a 'symbol' that points to a God who cares and is concerned about suffering and this is seen as being like Jesus. This again is transmitted through the connections and relationships as communicative acts established by the minister as they enact mission amongst non-churched young people and is shaped over a period of time. This practice of being there is also demonstrated in the ministry of Mark; again, being there is a theological shorthand expression of the complexities of practice. Here, Mark functions as a 'symbol' that points to how God is interested in the whole of people's lives. Mark (292-300) expresses this through a story of how he worked with a young person; this is articulated as being there for them again in the midst of a very challenging time. This particular young person was suffering due to the death of his dad and he had no male role model. Mark became a role model for this young person and it led to the young person wanting to emulate what Mark was living out. Mark uses the phrase model to articulate how the young people want to model what he is doing in terms of working with young people. This again is a demonstration of how Mark enacts mission

amongst non-churched young people, but this mission is seen in its widest sense, about enabling and helping young people to become participants and contributors to society. For Mark (309-310), this wider sense of mission is expressed by seeing his practice as being concerned about their whole life and like the practice of Tom, Jill and David has an expressed focus on orthopraxis and strongly evokes the practice of *diakonia*.

The Cost of Being There

The emphasis on orthopraxis and the practice of *diakonia* is again seen in Rachel's ministry as she articulates her mission amongst non-churched young people through being there. Again Rachel articulates this sense of mission in its widest sense, enabling young people to become more socially responsible. However, for Rachel, the cost of being there resonates through the narrative. This is expressed in how Rachel (51 -54) began working on an estate in South London where she met a girl called Sarah. For Rachel, being there acted as the vehicle through which a relationship became established and connections were made. The act of being there is an enacted 'symbol', a committed expression of faith and represented through the act of listening. Within this story, the other theme of time and journey is seen, but this is implied and not made explicit. However, through this dedicated act of being there, through a committed act of listening, a relationship began to take shape. Rachel (59-61) illustrates this by seeing that Sarah needed some attention; as Rachel sees, she just wanted someone to listen to her problems. Therefore, this committed act of listening by Rachel represented a willingness to be present with Sarah, someone willing to give the time and be there with her. Moreover, through the act of listening, a relationship was formed. However, even though a relationship had been established it was not unproblematic.

Rachel (79-90) says: *'there were occasions when I was in tears and I was like 'Jesus' you need to help because I can't give up on her, but she's driving me insane, she would call me at all sorts of hours of the night. It was like two years after I left the estate and I stayed in contact with her, but it was so difficult as I wasn't allowed to go for coffee unless I had her mum's consent.*

Her Mum ended up in hospital and it made it a really difficult relationship to keep up actually and I found that really hard'.

Although I found it hard, it is why I wanted to be working there, it was from the example Jesus set of making friends with people who no one else wants to be friends with. ' (Rachel, 152-154).

Within Rachel's expression of difficult and hard, the act of being there as a 'symbol' of who God is, is costly. Rachel wrestles with this as she enacts her faith as she seeks to be like Jesus within this situation. However, being there as a 'symbol' of practice led Sarah to ask to come to church (Rachel, 97-100). Therefore, through this embodied act of mission and Rachel being there for Sarah, it led Sarah to ask questions of Rachel's (125-130) faith, especially around issues of suffering and sex before marriage. Again, within this enacted story of mission amongst non-churched young people, we see in Rachel's reflections the intersecting of the four themes. The encounter flourishes through the relationship established, but it was the committed act of being there through listening that established the relationship as a communicative act. Through this process Rachel acted as a 'symbol' that pointed to God and the deeper realities and of her faith. This led to questions being asked by Sarah. Moreover, this story finds theological expression and articulation by Rachel locating the very reason why this piece of practice, to be like Jesus, took place. Here again, we can see the complex nuances of practice expressed in the theological shorthand of the phrase like Jesus and being there. Again this encompasses and resonates with the practices of *marturia* and *diakonia* and has a focus on orthopraxis. Consequently, this being there and the establishment of a relationship took time. The journey lasted three years and went beyond and outside the established boundaries of the original project. It is the theme of time and journey that is explored next.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Time and Journey

The theme of time and journey expresses the commitment of being there. Being there is an enacted theological moment in time and space through which the youth minister 'symbolises' and embodies a greater reality - it is an act of faith. This is seen as being like Jesus as model; therefore, as has been discussed, both being there and like Jesus act as theological shorthand. They are transmitted and given direction and shape through the connections made. These are carried by the relationships

which function as communicative acts, but this takes time and the creation of a liminal space. In this liminal space our youth minister practitioners seek to be like Jesus. This is a place of transition, a threshold, of waiting and not knowing, a place of movement and life. Within this liminal space, there is an interdependence between the themes - relationships, being like Jesus and being there, all take time, and this is either explicit or it is implied through the idea of journey and is an embodied act of faith in a series of moments. Being there as an embodied act of faith is given expression through the words time and journey and is articulated within the thoughts of all of the practitioners:

Andrew (30,31, 147,148,190,192,223,230); Rachel (118, 93); Mark 223,237,277,281); David (53,96,132,171); Jill (27,44,150,175,331,332) and Tom (21,31,53,70,85,86, 87,88,117,142,291)

As the youth ministers told stories and articulated how they enacted mission amongst non-churched young people, the sense of time is expressed clearly:

Tom (53) *'over time, obviously you build relationships'*, Tom (87-89) *'actually the biggest gift I can give a young person is time, because actually most adults they encounter can't give them much time, and a lot of them don't get any time with adults'*, Tom (89-92) *'it's not a time when you are setting an agenda, it's time when they are able to share their own thoughts and their own experiences, and that actually you provide a listening ear'*

Andrew (30, 31) *'over a period of about three years we got to know them relationally . . . it is all about time to share your life'*.

Mark (277), *'the key is actually spending time with people'*

In Tom's expression above, he articulates and places an emphasis on time as a gift and as a commodity in his enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. There is also the sense of space when time is available with no agenda and space is given to be present and provide a listening ear. This resonates with Rachel's thoughts above, as the act of being there finds expression through listening. For Tom (85-86), this is drawn from how Jesus worked in investing in others and there is direct correlation between being there for a young person and being like Jesus and the time this takes. However, the complex and nuanced process within practice is held in the

notion of time and can be seen as theological shorthand that evokes the practices of *marturia* and *diakonia*. Moreover, Andrew (79-81) also sees the value of time and how this acts to create a liminal space. Here, being there for a young person, and the time for conversations becomes a space where Andrew seeks to communicate something of his life. It is being present with a young person and this takes time and builds connections and, through a relationship that functions as a communicative act, faith can be seen to be transmitted. Additionally, like Tom, Andrew (82-83) makes a direct link to being like Jesus, as he expresses that as Jesus worked with his disciples it took time. Mark (237) also expresses the physical length and amount of time it can take when working with young people and, for Mark, the time spent brings about a change in the young person (Mark, 238-240) and, like Andrew and Tom, there is a direct correlation between this thinking and being like Jesus (Mark, 277-278). Moreover, Mark (281) then links the idea of like Jesus to that of relationship and time. Through this interplay of relationships, being there, time and like Jesus, there is the creation of a liminal space, a place of waiting and not knowing. This is what the youth ministers were aiming for in their enacting mission and, as Mark (277) articulates, the key is in spending time with young people; it is time that unlocks their practice as *marturia* and *diakonia*.

For Andrew, making time for someone, being there and being like Jesus is also expressed through the idea of journey. For Andrew (118), this means that you can journey with young people. Here, the sense of journey finds a deeper theological expression as he seeks to trust that God is in the relationship and, in the conversations that happen, God and Jesus are present. Here, Andrew (123-125), through the notion of journey, begins to express a deeper theology to being like Jesus.

For Andrew (128-132), following the work of the Holy Spirit, he sees that:

‘ . . . for me anyway, and I would like to think for our team here. It means that we need to trust God . . . but it also takes some of the responsibility away from us. Because whether or not these people end up following Christ or not is actually not down to us, it’s down to God’s Spirit’.

As Andrew adopts this theological view, it leads him to see time as a pivotal part of his enacting of mission amongst non-churched young people (Andrew 182-185).

Here Andrew begins to articulate the twinning between relationships as communicative acts and how important the aspect of time is within this process. Andrew (185 -189) sees that the young people who have become interested in Christianity are those young people that he has spent time with and sometimes this time can be seen as wasted time. Yet, the sense of wasted time is important as they are allowed space to discover God. This is the creation of a liminal space, a threshold, a time of not knowing, trusting and waiting. The creation of a liminal space again marks out time as a commodity and here are echoes of the idea of time as a gift that we see in Tom's thinking. But for Andrew this sense of wasting time has serious implications. It leads Andrew (194-195) to see time as one of the core values of his work and central to his enacting mission amongst non-churched young people. It has led him to re-orientate his practice for the intentional creation of space and time to be with people – the intentional creation of liminal spaces. Additionally, within Jill's (26-27) expression of enacted mission amongst non-churched young people, the sense of time can also be seen in the creation of liminal spaces. This is again expressed through the notion of being there with young people, such as, on a park bench sharing food or hot drinks for many hours in the freezing cold of winter. Time is again central to her practice and, for Jill (150), she needed to be in it for the long haul. Again, there is a correlation of the themes between being there and time in the enacting of her practice as an act of faith. Moreover, Tom (116-117) articulates that the sense of time spent is actually part of his enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. Tom (190) sees that the time spent with them is mission. Therefore, it is the creation of a liminal space to allow God to work. Moreover, for Tom (190), this process of time spent as mission, the creation of a liminal space, is worked out and interwoven in the metaphor of journey and expressed through the term relationships and these function as communicative acts. Furthermore, Andrew's thoughts resonate with Tom as he also sees practice as a journey:

Andrew (219-231): *'you know all the talk is you journey with people. . . . yet, we get an image of trying to fix people rather than trying to journey with them'*

Tom (51-53): *'So it's journeying, relationships, but with a purpose, it's very much a journey and working with them at different stages and bringing in different challenges at various points. I mean our strapline is to journey with young people to see their lives transformed by Jesus Christ'.*

Tom quantifies this by telling a story of a young person who he started to work with at a local school. The other themes of relationships and being there reverberate through his narrative, but the element of time and sense of journey is expressed. In this illustration of practice (Tom, 58-70), a young person came to a cafe and, through the relationship, he joined a football team. Through this, he came to a mission group (Tom's adaptation of an Alpha Course), then to a discipleship group and then he came to faith and was baptised and confirmed. Tom (69-70) conveys this process as a journey, the young person went from being part of a group to making a commitment and the journey took about eighteen months. Within these ideas of time and journey is the creation of liminal space. To be present to someone, through being there, a liminal space is created, a place of threshold, of waiting and not knowing, it is a place of tension. Within the practice of Andrew and Tom, the theme of time and journey acts as theological shorthand for the complexity and nuances of practice and the communicating of their faith amongst young people; it again evokes the practices of *marturia* and *diakonia*.

Jill (172-176) also expresses the idea of a liminal space through journey and that sense of not knowing and waiting. Furthermore, for Jill (176-180), the journey created opportunities for questions, questions about her faith and why she did what she did. These arose from spending time with a young person in their difficulties and suffering. Within the idea of journey, as Jill expresses it, we again see the interplay of relationships and journey. Here, a relationship is established and, through being there, a connection and a transmission of ideas are found; relationships function again as communicative acts. Within this liminal space God is mentioned and pointed towards; here through being there we see the embodiment of 'symbol'. Jill sees that the young person knew that she was a Christian and through this sense of journey that Jill articulates a liminal space is created as Jill waits for God to act. Moreover, there is a sense of not knowing how events with this particular young person will turn out. Jill (179,180) expresses this sense of not knowing what will happen and how God will work in the future. However, the story ends on a note of hope as Jill (184), tells of how this girl's perception changed from having a cynical sense of a Christian as a '*God botherer*' to one where Christians '*aren't that bad*'. Therefore, for Andrew, Tom and Jill, the journey is a process, the creation of a

liminal space, a time and place where faith can be enacted and performed, but it comes with no guarantees, it is ambiguous.

Enacting mission amongst non-churched young people through time and journey and the creation of liminal spaces is a positive act of faith to be like Jesus and a positive act of waiting amongst the unknown as the youth ministers wait for God to act. Moreover, in this liminal space the youth ministers seek to move young people on in their journey, either to help them be better citizens (Andrew, Mark, Jill, Rachel, David) or seeking to move them into relationship with Christ (Andrew, Tom, Rachel, Jill, David). Therefore, this is what the practitioners are aiming for in their enacted practice. Moreover, it is possible to see time as linear and sequential, a place where connections and the transmission of faith is sought, as they seek to be like Jesus through relationships that function as communicative acts. In this enacting of faith the focus is on orthopraxis and resonates with the practices of *marturia* and *diakonia*. Yet, this complex practice is summed up through the theological shorthand of time and journey.

In the following chapter the data within narratives of practice is brought into conversation with the literature on youth ministry as missionary endeavour, as this practice of relationships as communicative acts is investigated further.

CHAPTER THREE:

NARRATIVES OF PRACTICE

AND THE YOUTH MINISTRY LITERATURE

As relationships as communicative acts are explored through the voices of the practitioners, the voice of youth ministry literature, and within the voice of Trinitarian theology, this chapter investigates the correlation between the voices of the practitioners expressed within the narratives of practice and the voice of the youth ministry literature as missionary endeavour. Current youth ministry practice can be seen to be guided by the normative voice and expression of relationships that is articulated through the literature on youth ministry. Therefore, through this chapter, the data from the qualitative interviews will continue to be explored, examined and analysed. This is approached by bringing the themes from the data into conversation with the literature on youth ministry. This again is held within the overall theological methodological frame work adopted from Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.96). This continues the exploration to seek new insights into practice through the way youth ministers enact mission amongst non-churched young people. This is the third step in the cycle and acts as further theological reflection on practice and as another level of analysis. Here it is possible to begin to trace out and map the echoes and resonances of how the youth ministry practitioners enact mission amongst non-churched young people in relation to what is written about youth ministry as mission. The overlaps within the data and the literature will be explored; the places where they connect and the places where no connections are made will be revealed. Furthermore, it is possible to see relationships as a construct, a practice that is supported by the discourse on relationships within the youth ministry literature, relationships are meaningful and meaning making, they are the medium and at least in part, the message.⁴²

To aid the investigation, the discussions are framed around a number of core texts.⁴³ These have been influential in the development of youth ministry as mission and

⁴² McLuhan (1964) 'The Medium is the Message', sees that a symbiotic relationship exists by which the medium influences how the message is perceived.

⁴³ These are: Youth Apart (1996), Ward (1997), Borgman (1997), Green and Christian (1998), Senter III et al (2001), Dean (2004), Savage et al (2006), Root (2007), Sudworth et al (2007), Pimlott and Pimlott (2008).

form part of reading on the courses on Youth Ministry at Oasis College⁴⁴ and CYM.⁴⁵ This gives a focus to the conversations between the data and the literature and enables a richness and depth to be developed through the relationship between the discovered themes. Again the four themes and their related inferred-themes are used to structure the chapter as this is explored. As the interpretive journey begins, the chosen literature will focus on youth ministry as a missiological task, rather than primarily a pastoral and educational one (Sudworth et al 2007, p.8). This is the arena of this thesis and within this the youth minister is seen as the agent and driver of mission amongst young people (Senter III et al, 2001, p.80). For Sudworth et al (2007, p.10), this has become a new paradigm within a post-Christendom context and has elements that resonate with the themes of relationships, like Jesus, being there, time and journey. In this new paradigm it is the modes of relational, incarnational, long term and encounter with God that become important within the conversations. This new paradigm resonates with the work of Young Life.⁴⁶

The work of Young Life is important, because as this organisation developed its work amongst young people, the incarnation was adopted as a framework for ministry justification. The incarnation became a pattern for ministry rather than a theological explication (Root 2007, p.53). Furthermore, the incarnation as a model of ministry begins to find its voice in the UK through the work of Ward (1997) and in the publication *Youth Apart* (1996, p.23-38). The echoes and resonance of this thinking has infused relational youth ministry in the UK and can be seen through the relational narratives of our youth ministers and their practice amongst non-churched young people. As explored and investigated in the previous chapter, this idea is worked out in the lived experience of our practitioners as they sought, through relationships that function as communicative acts, to be like Jesus and model this through being there, this takes time and is often referred to as a journey.

⁴⁴ With Oasis College (2010-2013), these texts from the core and wider reading within the CIMM, CFUV, ISCPP, UWP, TC modules. The influences can also be seen through the Oasis Youth Work and Ministry course 1997- 2008 where these texts formed 'essential reading' for the following modules YPC, ICP.

⁴⁵ These texts form some of the core and wider reading for the Midlands Centre of Youth Ministry. 2006-2009.

⁴⁶ For a critique on the history of Young Life, see: Tanis (2013). Young Life was created from the vision of Jim Rayburn whilst at Dallas Theological Seminary in 1938. Young Life had a focus on young people in school situations and contexts beyond the church. For more on this see Root (2007, pp.45-54).

The Relational Hermeneutic and the Evangelical Tradition

As the theme of relationships as communicative acts is explored through the voice of the literature, it is possible to locate the literature within the evangelical tradition. Here the influence of the evangelical tradition within the literature and the echoes and resonance of this within the voices of the practitioners can be observed and noted. This is seen through three interconnected areas: relationalism (Root 2007), plastic hermeneutics (Rogers 2007), and the mediation of the evangelical tradition (Bebbington 2004, cf Rogers 2007).

As the data has shown, the idea of relationship as communicative acts is central to the participant's expression of mission amongst non-churched young people. Relationships can be seen as a central part of evangelicalism and are foundational in its mediation of the Gospel in the UK (Ward 1996) and North America (Root 2007). Within the UK, Ward (1996, pp.37-39) sees relationships as being evident in the CSSM camps run by Eric Nash and the first of these ran in Seaford in 1929. 'Bash' camps as they came to be known had an emphasis on the quality of relationships with young people that were outworked through 'personal work'. Root (2007, pp.69-70), argues that this emphasis on relationships forms part of the evangelical's cultural tool kit,⁴⁷ seeing that evangelicalism has perceived itself as living in unsettled times since the nineteenth century. This resonates with Ward (1996, p.45), who argues, that within the UK evangelicals hit upon a 'grand strategy'. This 'grand strategy' aimed at securing the future for evangelicals by concentrating on building relationships with young people to win 'keymen' for Christ. The work amongst young people was promoted by Bishop Taylor Smith who saw young people as a means whereby evangelicals might hold back the liberal offensive. This 'grand strategy' had an entrepreneurial spirit that grew out of the work of CSSM, IVF, Crusaders and VPS⁴⁸ and Ward (1996, p.41) sees that this focused on success with the wealthy, educated and middle classes which was evangelicalism's most natural context. Furthermore, this entrepreneurial spirit drove evangelical mission in urban areas. As Ward (1996, p.63) observes, in the 1950's a generations of evangelicals

⁴⁷ Smith and Emerson (2000) note that this tool kit is formed through a theology that is moulded by the heat and experience of practice and takes three forms. These are relationalism, free-will individualism and antistructuralism.

⁴⁸ CSSM was the Children's Special Service Mission, this later became Scripture Union. IVF was the Inter Varsity Fellowship – later called UCCF (Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship). IVPS was the Varsity and Public School Camps.

moved the focus of evangelism from the youth fellowship and the grammar school, to the open youth club as they sought to reach young people within secondary modern schools. This entrepreneurial spirit resonates and echoes throughout the work of Oasis and CYM and these courses have a focus on relationships as the primary means of reaching young people, not only within church contexts but also beyond the church. This focus on relationships, as Root (2007, p.70) argues, is enacted as personal influence and reverberates through the literature; *Youth Apart* (1996), Ward (1997), Borgman (1997), Green and Christian (1998), Senter III et al (2001), Sudworth et al (2007), Dean (2004), Savage et al (2006), Root (2007) and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008).

Root (2007, p.70) by drawing on the work of Smith and Emerson (2000, p.188) traces this emphasis on relationships within the evangelical tradition to a core and foundational evangelical theology; a theological commitment to a personal relationship with Christ. This relationship is so central that it forms the centre of the evangelical universe; it distinguishes them from non-evangelicals and non-Christians and personal relationships guide strategies of engagement across all other structures of culture, whether in family, government or larger society. Therefore, this method is strategic in that it consciously attempts to influence others; it is relational in that it relies on interpersonal relationships as the primary medium of influence. Moreover, through personal connections and positive example, evangelicals believe they can influence others towards the benefits and joys of being in a personal relationship with Jesus. As Ward (1996, p.64) argues, this idea is also central to the historical nature of youth ministry in urban contexts within the UK and can be seen within the work of the Mayflower in Islington in the early 1960's and especially through the work of George Burton who pioneered this relational style. The development of this work has been documented by Ward (1996, pp.65-77), and traces the friction between the wider evangelical tradition and the developing Frontier Youth Trust (FYT). However, within the midst of this tension the incarnation is adopted as a key motif of presence and ministry justification, resonating with the work of Young Life (Root 2007, p.70). This concept of incarnation and presence echoes through the data, and is especially seen through the articulation of practice as relationships, like Jesus and being there. Furthermore, these ideas resonate with the theology of the early days of the FYT, where links were made between the incarnational language of

relationships, presence, the kingdom of God and Shalom. As Ward (1996, pp.76-77) argues, this was expressed by Jim Purton and was fundamental in helping evangelicals journey into urban mission. However, the theological frameworks of the Kingdom of God and Shalom are lost and not articulated in the stories of the youth ministers. A key reason for this is the influence of the literature on contemporary youth ministry that reverberates with the theology of Young Life and the incarnation as ministry justification as explored below.

Furthermore, the relational emphasis is not unproblematic; the evangelical relational approach that is advanced in the youth ministry literature and within the data can offer a one size fits all. Root (2007, p.71) argues, through the work of Smith (2002, p.188), that because evangelicals view the complex, socially structured world, through the simplifying lens of relationalism, they often offer straight forward and simple solutions to complex multidimensional problems. This resonates with the practitioners as they seek to use relationships to help young people deal with complex problems. Within the expression of youth ministry within the data this simplification could be called theological shorthand because the term relationship becomes a relatively straightforward description and the simplification of the complexities of practice.

The second influence from the evangelical tradition that echoes through the data is the idea of plastic hermeneutics. This is seen in how the youth ministers related their practice to being like Jesus. Rogers (2007, p.95), through the work of Malley (2004, p.73), argues that evangelical hermeneutics in regards to Biblical interpretation can have a very flexible or plastic⁴⁹ conception. Here the tradition presents the text as an object for hermeneutic activity, but the goal of that activity is not so much to establish the exegetical meaning of the text, but to establish transitivity between text and beliefs. This insight illuminates how the work of FYT and Young Life sought to position the incarnation as presence and ministry justification. This idea then becomes played out as model within the literature (Ward 1997, Pimlott and Pimlott 2008) and this model is mediated through relationalism as personal influence (Root 2007). This is what is seen in the outworking of the term like Jesus, where this becomes a theological shorthand expression for the outworking of those beliefs in

⁴⁹ Rogers (2004, p. 95) applies this term to Malley

practice that are inspired by the acts and stories of Jesus. Furthermore, the idea of model within the literature, and within the data of being like Jesus, become a plastic hermeneutic that is moulded and shaped to a wide variety of different situations and missional activity amongst young people.

The echoes of evangelical thinking can also be seen in a third interrelated area - how the literature is the louder voice in the guiding of practice. This resonates with how the evangelical tradition has historically tended to mediate ideas. Here Bebbington (2004, cf Rogers 1997, p.94) argues, that the overriding pattern was for ideas to spread from above to below. This resonates with the 'grand strategy' and the work of the youth fellowship, that as Ward (1996, p.45) sees, is largely the story of a movement downwards as the approaches developed in work amongst middle classes are adopted in work with those further down the social scale.⁵⁰ Therefore, as Bebbington (2004, cf Rogers 1997, p.94) argues, ideas and practices spread from groups with greater advantages to a wider consistency. Bebbington (2004, cf Rogers 1997, p.94) highlights three characteristics that facilitate this process: a) education, b) the well to do and c) the young. It is possible to see resonances of this in this study, for as Bebbington (2004, cf Rogers 1997, p.94) sees, literature is one of the key forms of mediation. Therefore, ideas of the educated or academic can be passed on and mediated to a wider constituency through the literature. This can be seen in how relationships, the incarnation, being there and the idea of model that occupy a central place within the literature, are then mediated and passed onto the wider constituency of youth ministry practitioners through the work of Oasis and CYM. The ecumenical and entrepreneurial nature of these youth ministry training providers play down the differing ecclesial traditions and the youth ministry literature becomes the common uniting factor and thus the louder voice in guiding the youth minister's practice. This is therefore louder than the Anglican and Baptist traditions and contexts of which the youth ministers are part.

Now that the scene and context for the discussions has been set, the exploration, investigation and analysis continues as the data is brought into conversation with the literature through the first theme, relationships as communicative acts.

⁵⁰ Ward (1996, pp.45-77) argues, however, that a faith contextualised within the upper middle classes does not travel well.

Relationships as Communicative Acts

The youth ministry practitioners talk about this theme of relationships in differing ways. David, Andrew, Tom and Mark are explicit about the theme of relationships, whilst for Rachel and Jill the relationships are implicit and implied. The relationships need to be 'built' (Tom, 35, 53,163; Andrew, 39, 90; David, 85,132,134,135, 193) and connections made (David, 54; Andrew, 14). However, relationships also have a softer way of being expressed through the notion of sharing of lives (Andrew, 43, 79, 147, 219; Tom, 164; Mark, 27, 107, 147,237; Rachel, 318; Jill,27).

Relationships also guide youth ministry as missionary endeavour. Therefore, in the practice and narratives of the youth ministers, relationships are a construction, a constructed practice for ministry. They are, therefore, meaningful and meaning making. They are meaningful because they are the medium of the mission and they are meaning making because they carry and communicate the faith, message and acts of mission of the youth minister. Therefore, the overarching theme of relationships as communicative acts, so constructed as practice, becomes the medium and at least, in part, the message, the *acts* of the enacted mission, the energy for the transmission and communication of the Gospel amongst young people. Here, the collapsing of the classic view of Christian practice as *diakonia*, *kerygma* and *marturia* into the practice of relationships takes place.

The sense that relationships act as the energy for enacted mission finds resonance in Ward's (1997, p.43) thinking that 'relationships are the fuel on which youth work travels' and beyond this to the model provided by Young Life. Therefore, not only is the theme of relationships central to how the practitioners view their enacted mission amongst non-churched young people, it is also central within the literature - *Youth Apart* (1996, p.36), Ward (1997, p.43), Green and Christian (1998), Senter III et al (2001, p.80), Sudworth et al (2007, p.11) Borgman (1997, p.30), Dean (2004, p.183), Savage et al (2006, pp.122-135), Root (2007, p.62) and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, p.75) all have relationships as a theme. Therefore, within the new paradigm, the term relationships acts as a construct of practice because of the meaning given to them. Here, the term relationships has become part of a discourse within the youth ministry literature and this discourse determines its interpretation and seeks to articulate its meaning and can be seen as a communicative act. In turn, this

discourse, at least in part, finds resonance in the lived in, and practice of the youth ministers. Therefore, current youth ministry practice can be seen to be guided by the normative voice and expression of relationships that is articulated through the literature on youth ministry.

There is, then, a connection between what is taught and written about within the missiological task of youth ministry within the new paradigm and the practice of the youth ministers as they enact mission amongst non-churched young people, there is a level of connection between the theory and the lived in practice. However, that connection only goes so far and what is surprising is the low level at which this is articulated. Within the embodiment of relationships as communicative acts and the articulated expression of relationships, there can be seen a theological shorthand, an uncomplicated way of expressing and articulating the complexities of mission and embodiment of the Gospel amongst non-churched young people. It encompasses a richness of ideas and a deep sense of performed theology, but this is simply expressed through the term relationship. There are two interrelated problems here. Firstly, the straight forward use of the term relational is down to the relatively simple expression of this within some of the literature on Youth Ministry. For example, in *Youth Apart* (1996, p.36) relationships are expressed as ‘we communicate through deeds and actions before we communicate through words’. This expression of the term relationships resonates clearly with relationships as communicative acts, but is a light description in terms of the richness that is found in actual practice that we have seen in the narratives. However, it finds correlation within the thoughts of David (86-88) who sees that: ‘*Christianity is so foreign that actually it needs to be introduced in a different type of way, through connections, through relationships, just by caring really for people*’. Within this statement from David, there is a richness of thoughts and ideas about how connections are made and about the transmission and communication of faith, as well as the pastoral care of a person, but these are carried and thinly expressed and pivot around the idea of relationship. In addition, this resonates in the work of Green and Christian (1998, p.33-38) and through the notion of Accompanying. Here again, relationships are central to this framework and are discussed, but the theological rationale, for these is weak.⁵¹ Furthermore, in the follow up work to *Youth Apart* (1996), Sudworth et al (2007,

⁵¹ For a critique of this ‘Accompanying’ framework see Thomson (2007, p.246-252).

p.11) give relationships a limited description. Here relationships ‘are the only means we have of enabling and encouraging young people to reach maturity in their physical, emotional, social and spiritual lives’. These are communicative acts, it is personal relationalism finding expression and there is correlation with how Mark (287, 288) sees the central activity of relationships. He says, ‘*if the relationship isn’t at the heart of it and you haven’t got time for someone*’, then you need to create time and ‘*if it’s outside of the session that’s fine - we can sort it*’. In the work of Sudworth et al (2007) relationships are also seen as central and the only vehicle to carry the holistic development of young people. Questions need to be asked if the limited description of relationships given here can carry the weight of what is expected of them. Furthermore, relationships are seen to be central and are to be made explicit within the post-Christendom paradigm as Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, pp.75-80,141,145) see. Relationships again occupy a central place in the work of Savage et al (2006, pp.122-155) but again this is a weak description and there is no robust theological exploration. Moreover, relationships are also given a shallow description by Borgman (1997, p.30), although, the essence of his description captures the nature of the enacted mission amongst non-churched young people of the youth minister practitioners: ‘we must live among them and feel the pulse of their lives, the beat of their hearts’. In Borgman’s (1997) expression, a correlation can be seen between this and the notion of sharing of lives (Andrew, 43, 79, 147, 219; Tom, 164; Mark, 27, 107, 147,237; Rachel, 318; Jill, 27). Therefore, the narratives of practice as told by the youth ministers in their enacting of mission amongst non-churched young people are only mirroring and reflecting and constructing the frameworks for practice from what they have observed, read and been taught from the community of practice that is youth ministry.

The second problem is intimately connected with the first. There is a link between this relatively new youth ministry missiological paradigm and the foundation of this approach within the Young Life frame work. Here the theological tensions and shallowness of this approach (Tanis, 2013) have worked their way out in the practice of the youth ministry practitioners. The practitioners have moved away from a diet of entertainment (Tanis 2013, Dean 2004) but have inherited the incarnation as ministry justification and as a pattern for ministry that becomes expressed as like Jesus and as model in the narratives of the practice. Although the youth ministry practitioners see

themselves as being like Jesus, the term incarnational is only used once by Mark and has been replaced by the overarching term relationship. At the heart of this lies a problem about the theological expression of youth ministry. In the examples given, there is a lightweight expression of theological thought around the term relationship. Therefore, within the articulation of practice of mission amongst non churched young people by the practitioners, there is a very limited verbalization of the richness and theological depth of relationships or of the themes and capital of this within the Christian tradition. The richness of this term is not articulated and importantly, not drawn upon or expressed in the lived in practice of youth ministers. That said, within the literature, Ward (1997, p.43) begins to give a deeper definition of the term relationship and importantly locates this in sharing in God's mission to the world, but again, ministry is still seen as a model (Ward 1997, p.29). Dean (2004, p.91) also articulates a fuller understanding of this term, and locates this beyond the 'role of the individual' as expressed through Ward (1997) and in the practice of the congregation. However, it is Root (2007) who gives the most articulate expression of the term relationship as he engages with this concept through a Christology found and developed through the work of Bonhoeffer. This is an important move and takes us beyond relationships that are like Jesus as model. However, at this level, there is a disconnection between the theological expression within Root's work and the lived practice of David, Tom, Jill, Mark and Rachel. Importantly, however, this finds deep resonance with Andrew's thoughts about his practice. Andrew (124) crucially sees that perhaps '*God is in that relationship*'. It is possible here to see echoes of Root's (2007, p.15) theology and thinking.

The practitioners have expressed how central relationships are to their practice. It is now time to explore how these relationships as communicative acts function, not only as a place of connection that links the life of the youth minister to the young people, but how these relationships also articulate and transmit the faith and act as circuits of influence and places of sub-cultural engagement. Again these themes can be traced back into the literature.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Connection

As the theme of connection⁵² is explored and investigated, it echoes in the youth ministry literature. The idea of relationships as communicative acts, as a place of connection is seen in Andrew's articulation of enacted mission. These ideas are present in the way the sharing of lives acts as a place of connection between himself and the young people. It is interrelated and acts as a place for the transmission and communicating of faith. This is explored below. In the verbalising of Andrew's relationships with young people, he used the term '*connections*' (Andrew, 14, 39). For Andrew, relationships are built, seeing that you need to '*get to know them and try and build a relationship, a connection*'. It is possible to trace the echoes of this idea of a connection back into Ward's (1997, p.46-59) work. Ward (1997, p.46) articulates similar ideas of connection, but uses the language of contact. The missional drive within the notion of contact is provided by the youth minister and again reverberates with the strategy of Young Life. It is the intentional meeting of non-churched young people in a place that is comfortable for them; it is about spending time with a particular group of young people with that aim of building relationships (Ward 1997, p.49). Again, we can see Ward's (1997, p.53) thinking echoing through the narratives the youth ministers told of how they enact mission amongst non-churched young people.

For example, Tom (179 -180) speaks about building '*intentional relationships*' and '*connections*' and meeting young people where they are, whilst Jill (16-17) also articulates Ward's (1997, p.53) notion of contact by expressing her ministry as, '*just by going where they are*'. However, the language of contact is not used, but this idea of contact is reframed through the notion of connection. Furthermore, it is possible to see the interrelation of the other themes of time and journey and being there. As Ward's (1997, p.53) notion of contact and extended contact is considered, he sees 'there is no short cut to developing a trusting and mutual relationship with a group of young people'. These themes become more explicit through the idea of extended contact as the intentional relationships develop deeper (Ward 1997, p.52). Moreover these ideas of contact and extended contact echo through Mark's (158) narrative. Here, this core theme of relationship is seen as a metaphorical bridge, a place of

⁵² This word also finds expression in the work of Lovejoy (1999) 'Making Connections'.

connection and communication, connecting the minister's life to that of the young person, there is interrelation between contact, bridge and connection that is carried through relationships as communicative acts and is expressed through being there.

The idea of connection that is expressed through the narratives of the youth ministry practitioners also resonates through Root's work. Root (2007, p.15) sees that 'ministry is about connection', one to another, about sharing in suffering and joy, about persons meeting persons . . . it is about shared life'. As the stories told by our youth ministry practitioners are explored, these themes shine through. In the stories told by David, Rachel and Jill, they shared in the suffering of young people, and Jill also shared in the joy and success. The interrelation between the research themes can be seen as connection is made through the sharing of lives that are enacted in being there. Within the idea of connection the personal cost of these connections as expressed through the narratives of Rachel, Jill and Tom can be observed. Echoes of the idea of connection and building relationships chime in the work of Green and Christian (1998, pp.21-27) as they develop their Accompanying motif. However, they do articulate a difference between counselling, mentoring and befriending, but the notion of connection remains through their expression of being there. In the work of Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, p.75), the reverberations of this idea of connection that echo in Jill's enacted practice can be seen.

Again this is expressed as being incarnational and they articulate it as being alongside young people in success and in times of suffering and struggle. Moreover, in the language of the youth ministry practitioners, when they use the word connection, it is again used as theological shorthand. It sums up this deeper expression of lived in practice that when they meet young people they are engaged in suffering alongside them. This is expressed through being there as they seek to be like Jesus to them when they are hurting, suffering and feeling alone; it is about 'persons meeting persons' (Root, p.15), but it is not articulated as such. This complex, nuanced and multifaceted practice is summed up through the words connection and relationship; again this is a partial description in terms of the complexity of practice and evokes and points towards a wider theological picture. What is missing, in all but one (Andrew), in the use of this theological shorthand, is the theological articulation that Root (2007, p.15) gives to the idea of connection, that Christ is not outside of the relationship, but within it.

The idea of relationships as communicative acts as connection has been explored, this reverberates through the narratives of practice and echoes in the youth ministry literature. In Chapter Two the inferred, but interrelated theme of transmission was developed. It is this that is explored next.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Transmission

This theme is inferred from the data and is found within the practice of the youth ministers as they enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. It sees that the youth ministers use and rely on the medium of relationships to transmit their faith and also to extend influence through their practice. It is possible to see these as circuits of influence - relationships as communicative acts. For Andrew (41-43), he seeks to enact mission through this process and through the desire to *'share something of our lives and faith which obviously involved us as Christians'*. Within the sharing of our lives as Christians, the idea of transmission can be seen, and through relationships influence is sought. Furthermore, for Mark (164-165), the relationship leads to how *'influence is granted because of the level of respect and trust'* they have for the worker. Therefore, for Mark and Andrew, these relationships are seen as a place not only of connection but of transmission that can carry and communicate the ideas and faith of the minister, they act as places of influence, as they seek to connect with young people and have moral sway. The role of relationships as communicative acts, as transmission, becomes a place of sub-cultural engagement⁵³. This is articulated by Tom (53-59), who sees that *'over time . . . you build relationships with them (yp) . . . and that there is a overlap of two worlds'*. Furthermore, in David's thoughts above, we saw that *'Christianity is so foreign that actually it needs to be introduced in a different type of way'*. Again the desire is that, through relationships, the Christian faith is transmitted and this happens through the embodied action of the youth minister by being there and seeking to be like Jesus.

Within these aspects of enacted mission the theme of relationships as communicative acts as transmission can be clearly seen. Furthermore, echoes of the theme of transmission can be seen in the cited literature. In the literature, it takes two forms; the first is through the term incarnation. The incarnation is taken as a model or

⁵³ For more on this see Hebdige (1988).

pattern and is adopted to communicate the act of faith from one sub-culture to another, through the medium of relationships and is articulated in the following, *Youth Apart* (1996), Ward (1997), Borgman (1997), Sudworth et al (2007), Savage et al (2006) and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008). The second is interrelated to the first, but the sociological motivations for this are unmasked through the work of Root (2007) and his work on the incarnation and relationships working at the level of influence within the paradigm of youth ministry as mission. Firstly, the term incarnation can be considered and the resonance of this can be traced through the narratives of the practitioners. Sudworth et al (2007, p.12) describes the term incarnation as 'it involves entering the young people's world and honouring them by taking it as seriously as they do'. The echoes of this idea ring through the narratives told by the youth ministers as they enacted mission amongst non-churched young people and finds particular resonance through the narratives of David, Tom and Mathew through relationships as communicative acts. There is also a link here between these thoughts and Ward's (1997) work. There is a strong correlation with relationships as communicative acts as transmission and connection to Ward's (1997, pp.43-59) ideas on contact, extended contact and proclamation. In Ward's (1997) model these are sequential and each build on the other until a deep enough relationship is established to allow proclamation to take place. In the practice of the youth ministers, very little verbal proclamation actually took place. What is seen is a very strong commitment to the relationship and the embodiment of faith and being there like Jesus. Therefore, there is a focus on and a strong commitment to orthopraxis.

The relationship becomes the place of connection and transmission but the transmission, the communicative acts, are the embodied faith of being there and being like Jesus in deed and action. Yet, although this is important, it is limiting in terms of the classical practice of *kerygma*, of spoken proclamation. However, being there in deed and action finds deep resonance in the thinking of Savage et al (2006, pp. 121, 162) and is expressed through the term 'prior mission'.⁵⁴ Although this concept of 'prior mission' is not articulated in the narratives of practice, this is the arena of the youth minister's mission. Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, p.75) adopt the

⁵⁴ Savage et al (2006, p.162) see prior mission, by drawing on the work of Ann Morisy, as appropriate contact and seeking an appropriate starting point with those who have little or no knowledge of the faith.

incarnation and this is expressed through having a focus on 'being, on relationships, on seeking to flesh out the Gospel through identifying with people as Jesus did'. The phrase 'as Jesus' resonates with the idea of model that is articulated through the narratives of practice and again, within Pimlott's and Pimlott's (2008, p.75) thinking, the incarnation is adopted for the transmission of the Gospel into particular sub-cultures. However, no in depth theological explanation of this is given, but this transmission happens as relationships act as circuits of influence as communicative acts and are established by the workers amongst groups of young people (Pimlott and Pimlott 2008, p.66-67).

The second point under relationships as communicative acts as transmission is interrelated to the first, incarnation, but this finds expression as influence. As seen in the work of Jill, David, Mark and Rachel the youth ministers used relationships as places of transmission as communicative acts, as circuits of influence. As explored above, Root (2007, pp78-79) sees that evangelicals have tended to use relationships for engaging in the sub-cultural world of young people. We can see this echoed in the thinking of *Youth Apart* (1996), Ward (1997), Borgman (1997), Savage et al (2006) Sudworth et al (2007) and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008), and we can see this thinking embodied in the way youth minister practitioner's enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. Importantly, this is how the youth ministers saw the medium of relationships to act as the transmission of embodied faith, as communicative acts, as the message, to seek to be an influence (Mark) on the non-churched young people they enacted mission amongst. Here, relationships as communicative acts as transmission can be seen in the narratives of Mark, David, Tom, Rachel and Jill and are used as instruments of personal influence.

Therefore, 'prior mission', or moving young people into more constructive roles within the community is sought through relationships as communicative acts as places of connection and transmission – as influence amongst young people. There is again here an interrelation between the themes. It is possible to see in the relationships which are established within the practice of the youth ministers that they have credibility amongst young people; they are seen by young people to 'get it'. Here, the care that the youth minister shows for a young person by being there translates or is transmitted as sympathy for the young person's situation. This

observation echoes through the literature and finds particular expression in the work of Dean (2004, p.180), Ward (1997, p.59) Borgman (1997, p.32) and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, p.75). Within the idea of relationships as communicative acts as transmission that function as places of influence, a deep interrelatedness with the other theme of time and journey can be seen. This is because influence takes place over a long period of time as has been expressed within the narratives of practice.

However, again, within the narratives of the youth ministers, we can see the complexities of practice, but this all gets summed up in the theological shorthand description of relationship. Within this correlation of the themes of relationship as communicative acts, being there and time and journey, it is possible to see that they pivot around what it means to be like Jesus. This pivotal theme is the one explored next.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Like Jesus

The next interrelated theme, like Jesus, as noted above, can be seen as a pivotal theme in the practice of our youth ministers. The youth ministers modelled and based their actions on being like Jesus. This theme, like that of being there and time and journey, is carried by relationships as communicative acts and the connections the youth ministers had made with non-churched young people. Again, the theme of like Jesus acts as theological shorthand, a relatively simple theological expression of the complexities of working and enacting mission amongst non-churched young people. As seen above, this theme finds expression, through the work of Tom (85); Rachel (153); Andrew (73); David (165); Jill (239) and Mark (22, 277). To continue our examination and investigation of this theme, we explore in more detail the lived theology held in these terms of look, example, mirror and see, the idea of modelling, of being like Jesus. To do this, the paradox between the richness of practice and the theological shorthand description of this can be illuminated. Furthermore, the data continues to be brought into conversation with the literature. How the youth ministry practitioners understand their enacted mission amongst non-churched young people is seen in the use of language reflected in the terms '*look*' (Andrew, 73,84; Tom, 85-87) '*example*' (Rachel, 153; Mark, 27), '*mirror*' (David, 165) '*see*' (David, 268; Andrew,74) and '*like*' (Tom, 99-102; Mark, 277; David, 165). This is theological shorthand, a partial description of the richness of the practice which transmits and

embodies the story of faith. Therefore, in the youth minister's stories, the theological expression and language is of a spectator and an observer. The words, look, example, mirror and see, are the language of being like, the language of imitation, with Jesus and his ministry as a model for their own. Moreover, Jesus evokes the idea of something to copy and observe and put into practice. However, what we see in the practice of our youth ministers is a reflection of what they have inherited, read and been taught. As noted above, through the work of Root (2007, p.53), Young Life positioned the incarnation as theological justification and the out working of this becomes a pattern for ministry and this finds resonance through the work of Ward (1997, p.45) and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, p.75). The idea of like Jesus as model reverberates through the narratives of practice and Dean (2004, p.46), sees that imitating Christ has long been a staple of youth ministry. There is an interrelation of ideas here that link into relationships as communicative act and as Dean sees, imitating Christ has been adapted by adults who work within youth ministry and value its potential for moral formation and influence. Furthermore, the idea of imitating Christ has a long history within the wider Christian tradition and is still held up as an idea that has relevance with contemporary practice (Holmes 2013).⁵⁵

This is an important theological and Biblical point, in the classical practice of the church this can be seen as *marturia*, witnessing to the love of God in Jesus Christ, but this is only part of the theological picture. The problem is that in enacting practice like Jesus as model, the person of Jesus operates at the level of an idea, it becomes a model for how to minister. There is a separation between like Jesus and participating within the risen reality of Christ's presence as the power of mission. Enacting practice like Jesus removes us from who he is cosmically and distances us from his risen person and the 'Jesus of History'.⁵⁶ Therefore, what is missing in the articulation of enacted mission amongst non-churched young people is the language of collaboration and participation. The practitioners did not verbalise that they took part in this mission with God (*Youth Apart* (1996, p.23), Ward (1997, p.25), Sudworth et al (2007, p.7), Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, p.65)); they did not join in with or participate in or partner with God in their enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. Furthermore, Root (2007, p.105) sees that we participate in

⁵⁵ See Holmes (2013).

⁵⁶ See Yoder (1972, p.103). See also Vanhoozer (2010, p.280-294)

the living active presence of Christ. Following this, the question of ‘Where is Jesus?’ in the understanding of enacted mission amongst non-church young people of our youth ministry practitioners can be raised. Moreover, as Dean (2004, p.47) sees, in relation to youth ministry practice, what is at stake in imitating Christ is not about mimicry, but identification – becoming one with Christ through the Cross, as he engrafts our lives onto and in his. Therefore, in practice, we are ‘in Christ’⁵⁷ and the practice is performed and indwelt by the power of the Spirit, it is participation in God (Vanhoozer 2010, pp.280-296). Furthermore, the language of like Jesus indicates the way the youth ministry practitioners drew on the Gospel stories to inform their practice, this is the process of plastic hermeneutics articulated above. However, the activity of Jesus that they draw upon is focused amongst the people Jesus served and met. There is no Jerusalem, no event of the Cross, no Soteriology and no resurrection. Apart from a fleeting mention of the Cross in Rachel (243) as mentioned above, the transformative power of the Cross is not spoken about or articulated in any sense, shape or form. At least in part, proclaiming the passionate love of God, the *kerygma* was absent. Therefore, there are tensions within the theological expression of like Jesus.

As youth ministry practitioners think of themselves as being like Jesus, problems can be seen, that are highlighted by Dean (2004, p.47),⁵⁸ but are missed by our practitioners. When we reduce the imitation of Christ to its ‘Xerox’ potential we choose selectively what parts of Jesus life to imitate, either through lack of Biblical and theological knowledge or through self selection. We see this echoed in the narratives of the practitioners as they only model certain aspects of Jesus’ life. Furthermore, we can assume that being like Jesus is self-evident and forces a one-to-one correspondence between first century ethics and our own. There are many aspects to being like Jesus, political, angry, prophetic, healer, rabbi - but, within the practice of the youth ministers, like Jesus acts as theological shorthand for model and moral example, with the youth ministers seemingly wanting to distance themselves from more overt evangelism. This resonates with Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, pp.66-67, 75) as they see youth workers following the work of God’s grace as they sought

⁵⁷ For more on this see Canlis (2013) and Vanhoozer (2010, pp.280-294).

⁵⁸ Dean (2004, p.47) sees that the Greek term ‘*mimesis*’, which we translate as ‘imitation’. ‘*Mimesis*’ means identification with the original and involves ‘*methexis*’ or participation.

to be like Jesus to them through practical help. Again, there are reverberations here of Savage et al (2006, pp.121, 162) work on prior mission. Furthermore, if the classical church practice of *kerygma* is limited, then *diakonia*, serving and helping others is collapsed with *marturia*, into modelling and being like Jesus. Therefore, at the heart of this practice is a limited Christology because of the emphasis on model. In addition, this focus on Jesus as model loses sight of the whole of the Biblical narrative; opportunities may be missed to adopt wider elements of the richness of the Biblical story to engage young people or to see God's wider communicative activity in the world.

There is then a paradox and a tension here between the theological shorthand expression and the depth of action and practice. Therefore, within practice, it would be possible to explore a deep theology that is embodied, lived and enacted. The theological expression of this within the narratives of the youth ministers – why they did what they do, is partial, yet it evokes a richer and deeper theology from within the Christian tradition. Moreover, like the idea of relationship as communicative acts, sometimes the theology is implied and is implicit rather than explicit. Again, like Jesus as model becomes theological shorthand for the complexities of mission amongst non-churched young people. Perhaps this is not surprising, for as noted, the idea of model as a pattern is infused within relational youth ministry due, at least in part, to the influence of the Young life model, and the articulation of this within some of the youth ministry literature (*Youth Apart* (1996), Ward (1997), Borgman (1997), Sudworth et al (2007), Pimlott and Pimlott (2008)). That said, there is also a paradox here, for within the literature a deeper source of theology is articulated (Ward 1997) and also through the work of Dean (2004), Savage et al (2006) and Root (2007). However, this is not articulated within the practice of the practitioners.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Being There

The third theme of being there is the enacted presence of the second, like Jesus, and becomes an enacted theological moment in time and space through which the youth ministers act as 'symbols'. This idea of 'symbol' is found within the work of Tillich (1962). The youth ministers as 'symbols' embody the qualities of that which they point towards and participate in, but through the narratives this is not articulated –

only the language of model, being like Jesus is used, as explored above. As ‘symbols’ youth ministers, through being there, are meaningful on account of their relationship to Christ. Therefore, it is an act of embodied faith that points towards Christ and seeks to be like Jesus, it can be seen as theological shorthand for the complexities of practice. The expression of the theme of being there is seen in the interrelatedness of this and the others explored so far. Being there, as ‘symbol’, is an expression of pastoral care and the coming alongside young people who are suffering and in very difficult situations. Being there is carried and is an expression of relationships as communicative acts. Being there is the way youth ministry practitioners build relationships in their connections with young people and it is how their faith is transmitted. Therefore, as the relationship carries being there this is both the medium, and at least in part, the message. The classical practices of the church through *marturia*, *diakonia* and *kerygma* are collapsed at this point into a network of relationships as communicative acts that enact being there as a practice. This has an acute focus on orthopraxis. Furthermore, this being there, like Jesus is modelled over time and through the narrative structure of journey. As the theme of being there is explored, this again will be brought into conversation with the youth ministry literature. This theme reverberates through Ward (1997, p.59), Borgman (1997, p.28), Green and Christian (1998, p.21), Dean (2004, pp.90-91, 176-195), Sudworth et al (2007, p.11) Root (2007, p.124), Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, p.75, pp.141-145).

As explored in Chapter Two, being there is expressed through Jill’s (44); Tom’s (104); David’s (46-53); Rachel’s (51-54); and Mark’s (292) practice and, within these, the care that these youth ministers demonstrate through being there, reflects and points towards God and how He cares for people. Here can be seen the resonance of Ward’s (1997, p.59), Pimlott’s and Pimlott’s (2008, p.75) and Savage et al’s (2006, p.164) thinking about how the care that young people experience can be seen as an activity of God and as a sign of grace. Moreover, we can also see echoes of Dean’s (2004, p.90) insight that when we talk about relational ministry, what we really mean is that young people need the ability to give and receive fidelity. For Dean, this fidelity is glimpsed in human relationships, but is ultimately found in God. As the practice of the youth ministers is investigated, this is what they are hoping for, that their compelling witness of being there for young people will lead the young people they work amongst to discover God, an idea that also finds

resonance in Green's and Christian's (1998) model of Accompanying, and in Savage et al (2006, pp.157-159) concept of patient sowing. In Ward's (1997, p.53) thinking, the idea of the youth minister through being there is a sign that points to God's grace and in Dean's (2004, p.91) thinking our being there for young people acts as an icon through which they may glimpse God's fidelity.⁵⁹

However, what is missing in both the idea of a sign and in the use of the word icon, is that they are static. They point to something rather than dynamically participate and embody the qualities of the item they point towards. As the narratives of practice are considered this is an important distinction. This is because through the youth ministers' relationship with Christ, they participate 'in Christ'. Therefore, we can develop an inferred theme of 'symbol' that it is possible to see in the enacting of mission amongst non-churched young people of the practitioners. The practice of being there as 'symbol' is a powerful idea. That said, there are two interrelated issues. The first centres on this notion of participation but this is not articulated. The 'symbolic' act of being there, within the enacted mission of the practitioners, has value because of the youth minister's relationship with Christ, but this is articulated through the language of model and like Jesus; it is articulated at the level of a sign. This is because, as explored above, youth ministry has been infused with the idea of model, pattern and imitation, inherited from the Young Life framework. There is then, a disconnection between the theological reality of participation of being 'in Christ' and the articulation of lived practice like Jesus. Secondly, and interrelated to the first, for a young person to understand this being there as a 'symbolic' act needs a certain amount of theological capital. Unless a young person understands wider aspects of the Christian story, being there as 'symbol' and being like Jesus, acts that are and become attributed to God by the youth ministers, may not be interpreted symbolically. They may misleadingly seem to imply ordinary examples of care and concern. Of course these ordinary examples of care and concern are very important, but the point is, this is not what our youth ministers see themselves doing as they enact mission amongst non-churched young people.

The lived in expression of youth ministers as 'symbol' shines through the narratives of practice that were explored in the previous chapter. Through being there, Tom

⁵⁹ It is worth noting the distinction between a 'sign', an 'icon' and a 'symbol'. In Tillich's (1962) thinking a 'sign' is consciously invented and can be removed, whilst a 'symbol' embodies the qualities of that which it points towards.

acts as a 'symbol' that points towards a God who cares and this is demonstrated and lived out in the actual practice of care and concern of being there amidst suffering for this young girl. This resonates with both Ward (1997, p.53), and Dean (2004, p.91). For David (46-53), being there is very real and has a very practical outworking as an expression of his enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. For David (69-70), being there finds direct correlation with the person of Jesus. What is seen in the youth ministers' practice, as they enact mission amongst non-churched young people, is that being there acts as theological shorthand, a way of summing up the complexities of embodied care and concern for young people that is lived out like Jesus and is seen to point towards God. In addition, in the narratives of practice of the youth ministers, being there is seen primarily as an individual's responsibility. This is not surprising, when we consider the direction of travel that is expressed within some of the literature, as is evident within Ward (1997, pp.43-63) Borgman (1997, pp.28-30) Green and Christian (1998) and Senter III (2001, p.80). It is evident in this new paradigm that is articulated by Sudworth et al (2007, p.10), Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, pp.66-67,75) and Savage et al (2006, p.157), where the missional drive is provided by adults working incarnationally amongst young people because of their cultural distance from the church. Within the narratives of practice explored, Mark, Rachel and Jill primarily work beyond the 'boundaries' of church. This has echoes with Ward's (1997, p.11) framework of 'outside in'. Whilst David, Andrew and Tom, primarily work within a church context and echo Ward's (1997, p.7) framework of 'inside out'. However, what is not articulated and is not made explicit in *all* the narratives of practice of the youth minister practitioners is the role of the Church and its connection with mission amongst non-churched young people. Being there in the expression of the youth ministry practitioners has a focus on the individual's pursuit and not on a congregation. That said, there is a corrective to this within the literature, as Ward (1997, p.65) sees that church is 'not an optional extra', and Green and Christian (1998, p.13) note that young people are to learn the art of stewardship of the church; Sudworth et al (2007, pp12-13, 102-114) say that young people need to be part of a worshiping community; *Youth Apart* (1996, p.37) sees the church as the aim of the Gospel; and Senter III et al (2001, pp.1-35) have a focus on an inclusive congregational approach. Moreover, both Dean (2004, p.91) and Root (2007, pp.17, 197-217) seek to locate the practice of being there to a congregation and a Christian community. However, this is missing and is not expressed within the

narratives of the youth ministry practitioners in their view of enacted mission. The non-articulation of the role of the church community is telling and demonstrates a level of disconnect in the enacted ministry of the practitioners and the richness of the Christian tradition. This is more than mere oversight, the un-tethering from the tradition isolates our practices and removes us, as Dean (2004, p.186) sees from the intergenerational witness of a congregation and isolates us from the broader interpretive lens of the Christian community. Furthermore, through the theological shorthand expression of being there, there is a level of distance from the richness of theology and understanding of those pilgrims and saints⁶⁰ who have gone before, that is carried in the tradition, that has carried the story and that may illuminate, critique and serve practice⁶¹ and act as fresh and re-imagined points of connection for young people (Savage et al 2006, p.59).

As this theme of being there has been explored, it is possible to see this as the enacted presence of the second theme like Jesus. The articulation of how the youth minister practitioners act as 'symbol' has been investigated, exploring how the enacted mission amongst non-churched young people is seen primarily as an individual pursuit with a focus on orthopraxis. In the Chapter Two, being there was seen as being carried through time and evokes the narrative structure of journey held within relationships as communicative acts. This is either explicit or it is implied by the stories told by the youth ministers. It is this theme that is investigated next, again bringing it into conversation with the youth ministry literature.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Time and Journey as Liminal Space

In Chapter Two, the theme of time and journey expresses the commitment of being there. Being there is an enacted theological moment in time and space through which the youth ministers 'symbolise' and embody a greater reality - it is an act of faith. This is seen as being like Jesus as model; therefore, as seen above, both being there and like Jesus act as theological shorthand. They are transmitted and given direction and shape through the connections established in the web of relationships as communicative acts, but this takes time and the creation of a liminal space. In this liminal space the youth minister practitioners seek to be like Jesus. This is a place of

⁶⁰ See Holmes (2013) .

⁶¹ See Murray (2011).

transition, threshold, of waiting and not knowing, a place of movement and life. However, this possibility of a liminal space, a place for encountering God is summed up again as theological shorthand through the notion of time and journey. Within this liminal space, there is an interdependence between the themes, relationship as communicative acts, being like Jesus and being there; these all take time and this is either explicit or it is implied through the idea of journey and is an embodied act of faith in a series of moments. However, following the analysis of being like Jesus, the question can be asked of where our youth ministry practitioners think Jesus is in the embodied moments of faith in this liminal space.

Again, as explored in Chapter Two, being there, as an embodied act of faith, is given expression through the words time and journey and is articulated within the thoughts of Andrew (30,31, 147,148,190,192,223,230); Rachel (118, 93); Mark 223,237,277,281); David (53,96,132,171); Jill (27,44,150,175,331,332) and Tom (21,31,53,70,85,86, 87,88,117,142,291), as they told stories and articulated how they enacted mission amongst non-churched young people. The idea of relationships as communicative acts through the notion of time finds acute resonance in Ward's (1997, pp.43-60) work. He sees that the five stage framework which is adopted from Young Life takes a long time and is a long-term process in building and establishing the relationships.⁶² Ward (1997, p.49) sees that 'contact work is first and foremost about spending time with a particular group of young people and that it is about long-term relationship building'. Furthermore, Ward, (1997, pp.52-60) argues there is 'no substitute' and no 'short cut' in this, it is 'long term'. This framework of time echoes clearly through the narratives of youth ministry practice which we have been exploring. For example, as Andrew (147), sees, '*it is all about 'time to share your life'*' and again as Tom (53), notes '*over time obviously you build relationships*' and in Mark's (273) thoughts, '*I suppose over the years, it's me spending time with those individuals*'. The notion of sharing your life, as expressed by Mark, resonates with the notion of nurture and the implied time this takes in the work of Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, pp.141-145). Furthermore, as articulated in the last chapter, through the ministry of Tom (87-89) the idea of time is given expression and weight and is seen as a commodity and as a gift. As this idea of the creation of a liminal space is explored, the idea of time as a gift finds resonance in the work of Green and

⁶² For an alternative view on this see Griffiths (2008).

Christian (1998, p.21) who see in the notion of Accompanying the greatest gift we can give is in the coming alongside or being there for a young person. Within this notion of time as gift is the creation of a liminal space through which the youth ministers seek to enact faith by being like Jesus, through being there as 'symbol', in relationships as communicative acts.

Within the narratives of practice, this idea of time is also linked with the narrative structure of journey. As seen in Chapter Two, for Andrew (118), it means that you can '*journey with young people*' and for Tom this sense of journey is also important. The idea of journey again finds resonance within the literature; Green and Christian (1998) articulate this sense of journey by 'accompanying young people on their spiritual quest' and Ward (1997, p.51) sees that 'entering the social world of young people is a spiritual journey. This also echoes in the work of Sudworth et al (2007, p.13) that youth ministers should lead young people to have 'encounters with God' rather than just 'belief' in God; and additionally in the work of Pimlott and Pimlott (2008, pp.145, 153) and Savage et al (2006, p.168) the word encounter and the idea of journey is expressed. The word encounter echoes with the idea of journey and the creation of a liminal space. Youth Apart (1996, p.85) sees that faith can be 'nurtured through relationship'. This idea of nurture resonates with the idea of journey found within the narratives of the youth ministry practitioners. Again the interplay between relationships as communicative acts, being there and time and journey is played out. A relationship is established and, through being there, a connection and a transmission of ideas is made through circuits of influence – relationships as communicative acts. This becomes a liminal space in which God is pointed towards, through being there as seen in the embodiment of 'symbol'.

Therefore, in the narratives of practices and in the enacting of mission amongst non-churched young people for Andrew, Tom and Jill, the journey is a process, the creation of a liminal space, a time and place where faith can be enacted and performed, but it comes with no guarantees, it is ambiguous. Enacting mission amongst non-churched young people through time and journey and the creation of liminal spaces is a positive act of faith to be like Jesus and a positive act of waiting amongst the unknown as the youth minister practitioners wait for God to act. The idea of a liminal space is not named as such in the literature, but echoes in the words encounter, spiritual quest, spiritual journey and nurture. What is named in the

literature by Dean and Foster (1998),⁶³ but is not articulated within the narratives of practice is the idea of the youth minister as ‘Godbearer’. Although not expressed by the practitioners, traces of this idea in the ministry of Andrew, Tom and Jill can be observed. For example, through the sense of journey that Jill articulates, we see this liminal space as representative of a young person on the threshold, as Jill waits for God to act, but Jill is also a crucial link in the process. It is also expressed within the thoughts of Andrew, (128-132) as he begins to articulate the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the idea of a ‘Godbearer’ resonates with what is implied, but this is not made explicit within the practice of the youth ministry practitioners amongst non-churched young people. The narratives of practice echo with the creation of a liminal space that could be seen to act as a womb and place of incubation for young people as they ponder and struggle with how God knows them and calls them into relationship with him (Dean and Foster, 1998, p.52). This finds further resonance in the work of Savage et al (2006, p.168) with the Holy Spirit as the ‘prior missionary par excellence’, and again in Green and Christian (1998) through their motif of accompanying and their notion of this as a spiritual quest. Through these phrases of prior mission, accompanying and journey as a womb and a place of incubation, the creation of a liminal space within our narratives of practice acts as the opportunity and space for mystery to be explored and embodied.

This liminal space occupies a particular place within the thinking of the youth ministers and here, our four themes collide. If relationships as communicative acts as connection and transmission are the threads that run through the narratives of practice and being like Jesus, through the embodied practice of being there, is what the practice pivots around, then the creation of liminal spaces through time and journey is what the youth ministry practitioners are aiming for. This time of wrestling, this time of threshold, this time of waiting for God to act, becomes a focus for the work. It carries the essence of how the youth ministry practitioners seek to enact mission amongst non-churched young people. The creation of a liminal space that is carried by relationships as communicative acts, allows a space where young people can experience the mystery of God, a place where ‘mystical unions’ are made

⁶³ Through the story of the Annunciation, Dean and Foster (1998, p.49) argue that God employs a third party (an Angel) to bear the good news to Mary. From this they say that youth ministers can re-imagine themselves as Godbearers, people who name the activity of God in the lives of young people.

possible. Through the work of the youth ministers, the mystery⁶⁴ of God has the opportunity to be explored and connections made and, if we follow the work of Dean (2004, p.199), can be named within their lives. However, within the narratives of practice we have been exploring, it is possible to see these opportunities as being limited by the theological shorthand that is expressed. The theological shorthand of being like Jesus as model and the theological shorthand of being there as ‘symbol’, raises three potential issues. The first is that with being like Jesus as model, the living active presence of Christ by the power of the Spirit is not given enough consideration or even scope, leaving answers to the question, ‘Where is Jesus?’ open and non-conclusive. The second is related to this through the notion of being there as ‘symbol’; this contains opportunities to participate in God, an idea that we explore further in the next chapter. Here we can move towards answering the question, ‘Where is Jesus?’ The third is that because the classical church practices of *marturia*, *diakonia* and *kerygma* are collapsed into this overarching theme of relationships as communicative acts, there is a loss of focus, a blurring of these interrelated but also distinct practices. If this was intentional or named within the youth ministry practice, we would be on a firmer foundation, but this collapse into relationships seems unintentional and to be no more than a historical accident inherited from the work of Young Life that infuses the narratives of practice and the enacting of mission amongst non-churched young people. Therefore, relationships as communicative acts forms a distinctly new, enacted and lived practice, but this has not been theologically thought through.

As relationships as communicative acts have continued to be explored through the voices of the practitioners and the voice of the youth ministry literature, this Chapter has investigated the correlation between these voices. In the next chapter Trinitarian theology provides a normative voice that helps to serve and illuminate youth ministry practice. It is this discussion which is investigated next.

⁶⁴ See Vanhoozer (2013, p.471) ‘Mystery’ from the New Testament Greek, ‘mysterion’, points to God’s plan for salvation that was previously hidden but is now made known in Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR:

NARRATIVES OF PRACTICE

AND TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

As relationships as communicative acts are explored through the voices of the practitioners, the voice of the youth ministry literature and within the voice of Trinitarian theology, this Chapter investigates the voices of the practitioners, expressed within the narratives of practice, in discussion with Trinitarian Theology. In this chapter Trinitarian theology provides a rich resource and acts as a normative voice that helps to serve, illuminate and critique youth ministry practice. This is advanced via the work of Vanhoozer (2010). Through Trinitarian theology, practice can be understood in more authentic and faithful ways.

As the Trinitarian conversation, is explored and critiqued this chapter will again follow, investigate and develop the themes found in the data. Through this fourth and final move within the methodological framework adopted from Swinton and Mowat (2006), an exciting turn of theological re-imagination is employed. Here, a more authentic and faithful understanding of relationships, like Jesus, being there and time and journey is advanced. This theological shorthand reveals an embedded theology that evokes the wider theological picture of the Christian tradition, yet, this broader tradition is not overtly expressed. Therefore, in this Chapter the wider theological picture of the Christian tradition is nuanced and explored.

Furthermore, the emphasis on relationships as communicative acts collapses the classic elements of the church's practices of *diakonia*, *kerygma* and *marturia* into the relational. Therefore, in this chapter, a more explicit description of relationships as communicative acts is advanced, we tease apart these traditional practices from this network of relationships, reframing and locating them in God's divine communicative action, moving beyond the limited description of relationships within the youth ministry literature and the theological shorthand description found within the data.

The second theme like Jesus, within the narratives of practice, is seen as a model. This again acts as theological shorthand for and points towards a richness of theological ideas, themes and concepts. In the last chapter, the reality of

Christological participation, of being 'in Christ' is seen not to be expressed.

Therefore, in this chapter, practice can move from being a model of like Jesus to be re-imagined as being 'in Christ', that is, held within God's communicative action. Importantly, the operant mode of participation is seen as fellowship (Vanhoozer 2010). Therefore, through the Trinitarian discussions, practice is reconnected to being 'in Christ', thus answering the question of, 'Where is Jesus?' in relation to practice. The investigation of the third theme of being there is the enacted presence of the second, like Jesus. This becomes a performed theological moment in time and space through which the youth ministers act as a 'symbol' (Tillich 1962). As a 'symbol' they embody qualities of that which they participate in, what they point towards. However, this is not articulated - only the language of model is used and is seen as being like Jesus.

Through Trinitarian theology we can give a richer definition of being there as 'symbol', demonstrating how its participative nature can be located in God's communicative action (Vanhoozer 2010). With this, we can move from being there to being there - 'in Christ'. Furthermore, through moving from being there to being there - 'in Christ', the *diakonia*, the service amongst suffering young people and the locating of this within the practice of the church becomes a litmus test for the normative voice of Trinitarian theology and youth ministry practice. Therefore, within the Trinitarian theology adopted from Vanhoozer (2010), practice is re-imagined as mission, no longer being focused on the individual youth minister, but located in the ecclesial relationships of the *koinonia*. Additionally, the narratives of practice, demonstrated that, in their enacted mission amongst non-churched young people, the practitioners are aiming for a liminal space. In the data, this is a place of wrestling, a place of waiting, a threshold where God can move and act. The creation of a liminal space opens the possibilities for mystery, a space where young people can encounter God. However, this is articulated through the theological shorthand of time and journey. Therefore, this becomes a space, not of waiting for God to act, but a place of God's communicative action, as Vanhoozer (2010) sees.

However, for Trinitarian theology to provide a rich resource which is authentic and faithful for practice, the Trinitarian discussion requires critique and evaluation for it to provide a normative voice for understanding practice. This is especially pertinent around the term *perichoresis*. The dialogue around this, through the work of

Moltmann (1981), Fiddes (2000), Kilby (2000) and Vanhoozer (2010), will help frame the debate as Trinitarian theology is brought into discussion with the themes found in the data. The debate echoes with tensions between classical theology and its reinterpretation in contemporary thought. The concept of relationships and the outworking of this through the *perichoresis* could be held up as an idea that would provide a normative move for the enacting of youth ministry practice. It is possible to see a cosy and symbiotic relationship which is attractive for the lived experience of youth ministry. The question is at what theological cost? For the notion of *perichoresis* has flourished into a theological paradigm and there are some deep seated problems associated with the moves made within this ‘new orthodoxy’. The ‘relational turn’ that has taken place in the recovery of doctrine of the Trinity needs to be unpacked.

As Vanhoozer (2010, p.113) sees, this has sent theologians back to the ontological drawing board. Here, the universe looks less like a conglomeration of separate substances and more like an interactive community. This is particularly the case in Moltmann’s (1981) Trinitarian theology that is advanced through his idea of ‘persons in relationship’ and located in his notion of *perichoresis*. Moltmann develops his ideas from the Eastern tradition⁶⁵ drawing on the Cappadocians. His ideas are important because, through his theology, the Trinity echoes and resonates with the language of participation and imitation. The idea of imitation chimes with the thoughts of like and model and observe found in the narratives of practice. Moltmann’s (1981) ideas have also been deeply influential in the out working of providing a model for social relations (Boff 1988) and our ecclesiological frameworks (Volf 1998). Moreover, Moltmann’s thinking has been important within youth ministry circles as Dean (2004), Root (2007a) and White (2013) draw on Moltmann in relation to practice. Through Fiddes’ (2000) thinking, we will look at a contrasting concept of Trinitarian relationships - of ‘persons as relationships’. This follows the operant mode of participation. Fiddes (2000), constructs his argument on the idea of ‘subsistent relations’.⁶⁶ These ideas find their origin in Augustine, who made a move in this direction, but are ‘named’ by Aquinas who gave formality

⁶⁵ According to Holmes (2012), the distinction between the Western and Eastern tradition is false one.

⁶⁶ Gunton’s (1993) is critical of this idea, that following Augustine, through the tradition of ‘subsistent relations’, there has been a loss in the sense of particularity in God.

to the notion by creating the term. Fiddes' thoughts are important because he develops a pastoral doctrine of the Trinity that has a strong connection to the lived experience of practice. But these counterintuitive thoughts also require evaluation and critique. Through the discussion, a more convincing argument for Trinitarian relations and human participation is set out by Vanhoozer (2010). He again builds on this idea of 'subsistent relations', particularly through the work of Aquinas, however, Vanhoozer's (2010) idea of 'subsistent relations' differs to that found in the work of Fiddes (2000). The difference is that Fiddes (2000) develops his ideas of 'subsistent relations' through the notion of 'persons as relationships', whilst Vanhoozer (2010, pp.244-247) develops the idea of 'persons as communicative agents' that share a common 'communicative agency'. Vanhoozer wants to hold onto to the traditional division between the immanent and economic Trinity that becomes blurred within the work of Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000) Therefore, questions need to be asked about what is meant by this operant mode of participation due to the differing interpretations between Moltmann (1981), Fiddes (2000) and Vanhoozer (2010).⁶⁷

Vanhoozer (2010, p.139) is critical of how the doctrine of *perichoresis* has become central in the revival of Trinitarian thought, calling this a 'new kenotic-perichoretic relational ontotheology'. His insights are important as he seeks to speak about God through God's interpersonal dialogue with the world. He frames this as God's communicative action, a relationship based on divine authorship⁶⁸ and dialogical interaction between God and humanity. We come to know God's communicative being, through his communicative acts in the Biblical accounts as God speaks and acts in relation to his revelation, the world and human agency. This moves beyond the idea of theological shorthand as expressed in the data, to a richer, we could say a remythologised,⁶⁹ description of the idea of relationships as communicative acts that is located in God's communicative action and the Biblical *theodrama*.⁷⁰ This locates

⁶⁷ Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000) Trinitarian theology can be seen as panentheistic. Fiddes(2000) theology can also be located within 'process theology'. These are points of difference with Vanhoozer (2010).

⁶⁸ For Vanhoozer (2010, p.xiii) 'authorship' acts as a convenient shorthand for the notion of verbal communicative action. He argues that the interpersonal dialogue between God and humanity that the Bible depicts and instantiates is the privileged starting point for Christian theology. Western theologians as diverse as Thomas Aquinas, John Owen, Karl Rahner and Karl Barth employ the notions of communication and self-communication in the context of divine revelation and redemption.

⁶⁹ As Vanhoozer (2010) argues, this is seen in contrast to Bultmann's demythologising. Remythologising moves in another direction, taking seriously the Biblical accounts of God speaking and establishes divine communicative action as the formal and material principle of theology.

⁷⁰ For more on this see Vanhoozer (1990)

youth ministry practice within the communicative acts and work of God, re-tethering the practice into the richness of the Christian tradition. However, before relationships as communicative acts through connection and transmission is explored, the interrelated ideas of projection and ‘persons’ in relation to the Trinitarian conversation need to be noted.

The Trinity: Projection and Persons

Within the discussion on Trinitarian relationships, Vanhoozer’s (2010) thinking finds resonance with Kilby’s (2000) argument. Kilby sees that contemporary Trinitarian theology has developed a ‘new orthodoxy’, especially around concepts of *perichoresis* and the social doctrine of the Trinity, that involves theologians projecting ideas of human relations and relatedness back onto God. Holmes (2013) is also critical of the explosion of theological work on this topic within the twentieth century. He sees that this has been misunderstood and distorted the doctrine of the Trinity so badly that it is unrecognizable from what was set out in the fourth century. Kilby (2000) argues that over the last three decades there has been resurgence in Trinitarian theology amongst Roman Catholic and Protestant writers. Furthermore, within these writings, there is a lament about how the doctrine of the Trinity has been neglected and needs to be recovered. Kilby (2000, p.1) sees that this has followed Rahner’s diagnosis that Christians were almost monotheists paying lip service to the Trinity, but ignoring the Trinity in practice. However, if there is a consensus about the problem, then for Kilby (2000, p.1), there is also something of a consensus as regarding the solution. The solution has been to advance the social understanding of the Trinity. It is within this social understanding of the Trinity that Tanner (2004, p.320) argues that theologians are enlisting support for particular kinds of community. For example: following Moltmann’s (1981) social doctrine of the Trinity, of ‘divine persons in relationships’ - we see the social models put forward by Boff, (1988) and Volf, (1998). Within these social models, the ideas of imitation and mirror are discovered that, as noted, resonate with the idea of model found within the data. Furthermore, Kilby (2000, p.1) is critical of the way the social doctrine of the Trinity has been used and the claims made as the chief strategy of reviving the discussion of the Trinity in recent times. For Kilby, this has gathered pace since Moltmann’s (1981) *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, and although her argument is not directed at the analogies themselves, the authoritarian claims

made for the promotion of this social doctrine of the Trinity and the cascading of this into social, political (Boff 1988) and ecclesiological models and patterns (Volf 1998) is deeply problematic, especially when worked out through the notion of *perichoresis*.

For Kilby (2000), this is because when the social doctrine of the Trinity is applied as a resource for Christian theology, it draws on *perichoresis* to name what is not understood about the inner reality of God. Kilby (2000) sees that the interrelatedness of the Trinity, as played out in the divine *perichoresis*, makes God intrinsically attractive. Here God's 'inner life' is presented as having positive implications for that which is not God. For Kilby (2000, pp.3-5), this becomes a three stage process. Firstly, the term *perichoresis* is used to name what is not understood, to name whatever it is that makes the three persons one. Secondly, the term *perichoresis* is filled out rather suggestively with notions taken from experience of relatedness and relationship; and thirdly, it is presented as an exciting resource that Christian theology has to offer the wider world in its reflections on relatedness and relationships. Although not named by Kilby (2000), these criticisms on relatedness and relationships can also be levelled at Fiddes (2000).

Vanhoozer (2010, p.157-159) follows Kilby (2000), at least in part, and, by drawing on Feuerbach, is also critical of how relations and relatedness have been 'projected' on to God. For Vanhoozer (2010, p. 159) Feuerbach sees the Trinity as a projection of the human ideal of a 'participated life'. He sees Christian doctrine mirroring lived human relations and that humanity as social beings need a God in whom there is society – a 'union of beings' fervently loving one another. However, Kilby (2000) and Vanhoozer (2010, p.245) differ, because Vanhoozer argues that we can participate in the communicative acts of God. This Vanhoozer (2010, p.xiv) calls '*theodrama*', this is a '*doing*' in which God gets the most important speaking and acting parts. However, Kilby (2000, p.14) argues that the Trinity should become a doctrine that acts like a grammatical framework, due to theologians being unable to 'name' the personal attributes of God's being.

As the idea of relationships and Trinitarian Theology is explored, we need to note the discussions around the term 'person'. This is a complex and well rehearsed

debate and lies outside the scope of this thesis, but it is Zizioulas (1985, p.16)⁷¹ who gives the fullest account of the relational nature of ‘personhood’ to date. As Vanhoozer (2010, p.115) sees, this radically reshapes the nature of ‘persons’ by drawing on the doctrine of the Trinity. God’s being is a consequence of his ‘personhood’, this ‘personhood’ is a matter of relationships and not of a self enclosed ‘substance’. As Holmes (2012, p.13) sees, Zizioulas, through the Cappadocians, took the classical language of Greek ontology – *ousia* and *hypostasis* and redefined it in personal and relational terms. The basis of reality was no longer ‘substance’, but ‘relationship’, ‘cause’ was fundamentally now not a physical category, but a ‘personal’ one.⁷²

Therefore, for Zizioulas (1985), ‘to be is to be in relation’ and the differing interpretations of this through Moltmann (1981), Boff (1988), Volf (1998), Cunningham (1998), Gunton (1993) and Fiddes (2000) has become a foundational thought in the recovery of Trinitarian theology and has brought relationships and relatedness to centre stage.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Connection

The data showed how relationships as communicative acts as connection, are important in the enacting of mission amongst non-churched young people. In the last chapter, the echoes of this idea of relationships as communicative acts as connection could be traced back into Ward’s (1997, p.46-59) work on contact, and beyond into the work of Young Life. Furthermore, Moltmann’s (1981) thinking has been influential and important in developing a theology that serves youth ministry practice as Dean (2004), Root (2007a), White (2013) argue. Therefore, just as these academic thinkers have linked Moltmann to contemporary practice, it would be possible to find resonance between relationships as communicative acts as connection and Moltmann’s (1981) thinking. This move could be made in two ways: firstly, how he views the Trinitarian relationships as human participation and, secondly, how this becomes a model for our social relationships. Both of these thoughts could be expanded and interwoven into how we connect and participate with God and how this models our connections with others in community as an example of youth

⁷¹ Historically, the concept of the ‘person’, as Zizioulas (1985, p.27) notes, is inextricably linked with theology.

⁷² Zizioulas (1985, p.38) notes that the history of the terms ‘substance’ and ‘hypostasis’ is extremely complicated. For a full account of this dispute see p.38 and footnote 30

ministry practice. Yet, on closer inspection, this is worked out in ways that are not entirely successful and convincing - we are invited to participate in these relationships and at the same time these Triune relations are to be used as a model for our own social relationships.⁷³ How does this work?

In Moltmann's (1981) theology, the Trinitarian persons are in relationship through his idea of *perichoresis*. Here, he sets forth a social doctrine of the Trinity, God's being is an open fellowship of love – God's unity is community, a community of relationships, this becomes relational metaphysics. Moltmann (1981, pp.174-175) describes the *perichoresis* in the following way:

The Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another, and dwell in one another, to such an extent that they are one. In the *perichoresis* the very thing that divides them becomes that which binds them.

For Moltmann, (1981, p.175) the circulation of the eternal divine life becomes perfect through the fellowship and unity of the Father, Son and Spirit in their eternal love for one another. However, the major problem within Moltmann's (1981), and subsequently, Boff's (1988) and Volf's (1998) Trinitarian theologies, as Tanner (2004, p.324) argues, is how do we move from a discussion about God, to a discussion of human relations? It is here that these ideas become limiting within the theme of relationships as communicative acts as connections. In the work of Moltmann (1981), Tanner (2004, pp.324-325) argues that the problem here revolves around the acute focus on the so-called immanent Trinity. In the description of *perichoretic* relationships found within Moltmann (1981) what the Trinity says about human relations is not exactly clear. Other questions circulate as well, 'divine persons' are 'equal' to one another, but in what sense? The divine persons are 'in' one another, but what does 'in' mean here? For Moltmann (1981) humanity comes to participate in God's nature and being, we could say - connected to the divine life. But this has radical implication for the relationship between God and the world. For Moltmann, the Gospel becomes about the history of the divine persons in the world and for the sake of the world. Following Rahner's thesis, Moltmann (1981, pp.158-

⁷³ Bauckham (1995, p.160)

160) *almost* collapses the immanent Trinity into the economic. However, this move creates a tension between the created and the creator, between love and freedom. Vanhoozer (2010, p.152) argues that this move is deeply problematic. This is because God's history is 'open' to the world and it leads Moltmann (1981) to see that the unity of the three persons is inclusive not exclusive, creatures can participate in the divine relational matrix. Furthermore, there is real tension here between participation within the Trinity and the Trinity as a model for our human relations that, as seen below, causes numerous theological dominos to fall.

In Moltmann's (1981) thinking, these two ideas are held in paradoxical tension. Bauckham (1995, p.160) sees that, firstly, the life of the Trinity is an interpersonal fellowship in which we participate, through Moltmann's (1981) use of the *perichoresis*. Secondly, the life of the Trinity provides the prototype on which human life should be *modelled* and imitated. Furthermore, Bauckham (1995, p.160) is critical of this, seeing that this view of relationships in regards to the Trinity goes beyond the canon of Scripture and that the combination of these thoughts is particularly problematic. According to the first idea (participation), we are to experience the Trinitarian relationships from the 'inside', from the stand point of differentiated relationships to each of the three persons: we know Jesus as God who became human; we know God the Father as his and our Father; and we know the Holy Spirit as the indwelling of life and power. However, with the second idea (model), we are invited to stand outside this participation in the Trinity, and our specific relationships with each of the three persons, and view the Trinity as an external model which human relationships are to imitate and reflect.⁷⁴

As the theme of relationships as communicative acts, as connection in conversation with *perichoretic* ideas is explored, Fiddes also develops the idea of *perichoresis*. Fiddes (2000, p.71) sees that the term *perichoresis* expresses the permeation of each divine person by the other, their co-inherence without confusion, taking up and developing the words of Jesus in John 17:21-22.⁷⁵ Fiddes (2000), differs to

⁷⁴ Bauckham (1995, p.166) argues, are Moltmann (1981) and Boff (1988) really suggesting that, as we step beyond the differentiated relationships of the Trinity, we then come into contemplation of the three persons in their perichoresis, we then come 'face to face' or 'observe' God's eternal being? And are we then to reflect this in our human relations and community? If this is the case, then, how does this work?

⁷⁵ Two Latin terms were used which together bring out well the sense of the Greek term. First *circuminsessio*, which means that one person is contained in the 'another' – literally 'seated' in the 'another', filling the space of the other, present in the other –

Moltmann (1981) because his ideas on the *perichoresis* are developed through the notion of ‘subsistent relations’. Fiddes (2000) argues that this notion is often misunderstood. It does not just mean the divine *hypostases* which can only be distinguished by their relations with one another, nor does ‘subsistent relations’ just mean that the relations between the divine ‘persons’ entirely make them what they are. Fiddes (2000, p.34) continues that, properly understood, ‘subsistent relations’ mean that the *relations* in God are as real and ‘beingful’ as anything which is created or uncreated and their ground or existence is themselves. Here he differs from Moltmann (1981), yet his ideas resonate with Vanhoozer (2010).⁷⁶ Fiddes (2000, p.34) argues that, if we use the term *hypostasis* as the early theologians did for a ‘distinct’ reality which has ‘being’, then the relations are *hypostases*. Therefore, there are no ‘persons’ at the end of relations, as in Moltmann’s (1981) thoughts, the ‘persons’ are simply the ‘relations’.

These ideas find their origin in Augustine, who made a move in this direction, but are ‘named’ by Aquinas who gave formality to the notion by creating the term. For Aquinas, ‘subsistent relations’ meant stating that ‘divine person’ signifies something subsisting; ‘person’ signifies relation directly and nature indirectly, yet relation is signified, not as relation but as *hypostasis*. Fiddes (2000, p.35) notes that Aquinas arrived at this point through the influence of the Aristotelian view that the divine essence must be simple, or radically unified. If this is so, both the properties and the relations of the essence must be identical with it, so the relations in God will have the same reality as the one essence. This leads Fiddes (2000, p.37) to talk about God as ‘an event of relationships’. Thus, as Fiddes sees (2000, p.36), taking a cue from Karl Barth’s insistence that ‘with regard to the being of God, the word ‘event’ or ‘act’ is final, we may speak of God as an ‘event of relationships’ . From here Fiddes (2000, p.36) develops his idea of *perichoresis* as ‘three movements of relationship subsisting in one event’. For Fiddes, this is not the language of a spectator, but the language of a participant. Furthermore, it only makes sense when we see our participation, our connection and involvement in the network of relationships in which God ‘happens’.

this was preferred by Aquinas. Secondly, *circumincessio* is a more active word, evoking a state of doing, the interpenetrating of one person in another; it captures the sense of moving in and through the other.

⁷⁶ Fiddes also differs from Cunningham (1998) on this. Cunningham calls ‘subsistent relations’ – relationships without remainder.

We could, then, hold up the *perichoresis* in the work of both Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000) as a normative move that could give a richer description to relationships as communicative acts, as connection in terms of youth ministry practice. However, as we have seen through Kilby (2000) and Vanhoozer (2010, p.157), there are problems associated with *perichoresis*. This notion within contemporary theological thought has gone far beyond anything the Cappadocians could have considered, an idea that resonates with Holmes (2012) argument on the distortion of this doctrine. Vanhoozer (2010, p.157) continues that rather than performing a technical function in the Trinitarian discussion about how the three are one, the concept of *perichoresis* has flourished into a problematic full blown theological paradigm. Firstly, this is due to the collapse of the relationships between humanity, God and the world, and the tensions between participation and model in the work of Moltmann (1981). Secondly, as Vanhoozer (2010, p.157) argues, through God's 'being in relational communion' that is seen in the work of Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000), this interpersonal relationality has become an all inclusive idea.

What's more, the investigation of both Moltmann's (1981) and Fiddes' (2000) thinking on Trinitarian ideas about 'persons in relationship' and 'persons as relationship', are different enough to cause us to pause and ask questions as to how they can be derived from the same doctrine?⁷⁷ These contrasting ideas are, at least in part, due to the problems associated with projection which we have noted in the work of Kilby (2000) and partly because of the received understanding of the 'Trinitarian tradition'. As noted, Fiddes (2000) develops his ideas from a so called Western tradition through Augustine, although he also draws on Eastern ideas as he develops his idea of the divine dance. Whereas, Moltmann (1981) seeks to root the main thrust of his ideas in the so called Eastern tradition. However, for Holmes (2012, p.146), this is a false division.⁷⁸ It follows, therefore, that, for all the promise of connection through the inclusivity and openness of *perichoresis* in the work of Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000), this falls short of being able to offer a normative voice for youth ministry practice. It would just replace the construct of

⁷⁷ Holmes (2012, p.26) makes a similar point about how Zizioulas (1985) and Boff (1998) come up with differing theologies from the doctrine of the Trinity.

⁷⁸ Holmes (2012, p.26) sees that Augustine is the most capable interpreter of Cappadocian Trinitarianism and that by the end of the fourth century there is no fundamental difference between East and West.

relationships as seen within the data and in the youth ministry literature, with another, a construct of projected and theological ideas. Furthermore, this is a poor analogy of the relationship between God and the world, of relationships as communicative acts as connection because our human relationships are fundamentally *not* like the intratrinitarian communion. Therefore, a move can be made to talk about and locate relationships as communicative acts as connection in the idea of ‘covenant and fellowship’ that is held ‘in Christ’ as Vanhoozer (2010) argues. Vanhoozer locates this in the idea of God’s divine authorship and dialogical communicative action. To do this Vanhoozer has to take a number of theological turns. This subject is explored now.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Transmission

The theme of transmission is held in the idea of relationships as communicative acts. The data showed how the youth ministry practitioners used relationships as circuits of influence – a communicative act. Above, it was explored how this resonates in the literature through the incarnation, as worked out in *Youth Apart* (1996), Ward (1997), Borgman (1997), Sudworth et al (2007), Savage et al (2006) and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008) and how Root (2007) is critical of this.

To explore this theme within Trinitarian theology, Vanhoozer’s (2010, p.245) argument is convincing. He sees that God’s being is in communicating. This resonates acutely with the idea of relationships as communicative acts as transmission inferred within the data. For Vanhoozer (2010, p.245), the Triune life of God is made known through God’s communicative presence and activity in history and through the Biblical *mythos*. This *mythos* of redemption consists not only in a series of events but through the work of human agents. Drawing on the work of Aquinas, the relationships in God are distinguished from one another because they are ‘founded on action’. Indeed, the three persons are not only the *dramatis personae* but the activity of God’s being in communication: the *drama personae* are the drama.⁷⁹ Therefore, God’s being is an eternal communicative act and is the basis for his self-presentation to creatures, his ‘historical speaking out’. As Vanhoozer (2010, pp.245-246) sees, ‘the life of the incarnate Christ expresses the

⁷⁹ This resonates with Fiddes (2000) thoughts on ‘persons as relations’.

very action or movement of his eternal procession. Each of the three persons is a 'subsistent relation' in what is essentially a communicative act. The one God who exists as self-communicative activity does so in three 'subsistent relations'. This involves the life of the Father, Son and Spirit not only in a generative act but communicative relations. God's being is in conversing. Thus, the divine persons' are not only in dialogue, they are dialogue.

Therefore, God is the Father addressing the Son, the Son responds to the Father, and the Spirit overhearing. Moreover, the Spirit has a distinct personal identity of witness and participation in the communication that exists between the Father and the Son. At this point, we could begin to level the accusations of projection drawn from Kilby (2000) and see this reflected in Vanhoozer's (2010, p.246) thinking. However, Vanhoozer (2010, p.247), through the Biblical narrative, sees these actions in the economy (e.g. creation, revelation and redemption) as being attributed to each person and contributing to the same action in distinct ways. Therefore, everything God does through communicative action is ultimately Triune, a unified action with three dimensions. As Gregory of Nyssa sees, 'every operation which extends from God to the creation has its origin from the Father, proceeds through the Son and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.' (Vanhoozer 2010, p.247) This leads Vanhoozer to see Father, Son and Spirit as distinct communicative actions, but that they share a common communicative agency. This communicative agency is depicted through Scripture as interpersonal dialogue and it is through this that the *theodramatic* action unfolds (Vanhoozer 2010 pp.355-357). Yet, it is in the incarnation that God communicates all that he is in Jesus Christ. This is God's definitive self-communicative act. This is the form of the Son's self-presentation, the humanity of Jesus and this becomes the norm for thinking and knowing about God's being. This is the ultimate pattern for God's being in communicative act - embodied in the incarnate Word. This is nothing less than the divine content (i.e. nature) in human form: the ways of God made flesh. Therefore, as Vanhoozer (2010, p.357) sees, 'what Jesus says and does, God says and does for in Jesus is the plenitude of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14)'. The human life of Jesus is a self-communicative act, rooted in a particular human history, the enacting of the incarnate Son's words, acts and suffering. The *mythos* of Jesus Christ, the historical drama of his birth, life, death resurrection and ascension is the divine communicative action of which the church becomes its living effect and

theology the response. God is the unauthored author of his incarnation. For Vanhoozer (2010, p.358), the *kenosis* that Paul speaks about (Phil 2:7) is not a matter of divine self-destruction (i.e the abandoning of the divine nature and attributes) but of authorial ‘self emplotment’. The *kenosis* involves a change, not in the content of God’s being in communicative act but only its form.⁸⁰ God continues to be all that he is under the veil of humanity. The subject of this human hero, Jesus, is the divine Author, the Son of God. This is love: that the Author, while remaining all that he is, pours his uncreated self into created human form in time and space – made flesh, human blood and bone in order to communicate his love, light and life to others.

As the theme of relationships as communicative acts as transmission is considered this is an exciting move. The idea of communicative action through divine agency reverberates not only with the theme of transmission but with also connections. For in the narratives of practice, although not expressed, the youth ministers participate in this communicative action. This locates relationships as communicative acts in a deeper and more profound theological framework. It moves beyond the limited description of the incarnation in the youth ministry literature. It locates the practice of youth ministry in the economy of salvation, held within the communicative revelation and act of God in his work within the world. It moves the enacted, lived and performed practice of youth ministry away from theological shorthand and sets it into a rigorous, theological framework located in the canonical Biblical *theodrama* of creation, revelation and redemption, re-tethering relationships as communicative acts into the Christian tradition. Moreover, it gives the youth ministers a more extensive theological expression that enables them to articulate their practice in deeper and richer terms. Furthermore, the collapsing of the traditional church practices of *marturia*, *diakonia* and *kerygma* into the relational that is observed in the data can begin to be untangled, made more distinct through a richer theological description held in God’s divine authorship and communicative action. The question becomes how?

Vanhoozer (2010, p.242) suggests that to participate in God’s being that consists of communicative action and activity is to be caught up in the *theodrama*. But here, the traditional distinction between the ‘immanent’ and the ‘economic’, that is blurred in

⁸⁰ This is a Chalcedonian position. Vanhoozer (2010, pp.423-424) follows Cyril, who sees that the incarnation is about the person of the divine son becoming the subject of a fully human life. Jesus is the person of the Son, enfleshed as a man.

Moltmann's (1981) and Fiddes' (2000) thinking is preserved. Therefore, in Vanhoozer's (2010, p.242) thinking, the creator and created distinction is held, and acknowledges the distinction between God as uniquely the source of his own divine communicative agency, and the communicative activity of his created creatures.⁸¹ As this is explored, what this means for relationships as communicative acts, and as Trinitarian theology as a normative voice for youth ministry practice is considered, the distinction between the created and creature relationship needs to be persevered, rather than collapsed into a fusion of relationships between humanity and the divine. These ideas pivot around the operant mode of participation and it is this concept that is investigated next.

Relationships as Communicative Act: Like Jesus to being 'In Christ'

Within the narratives of practice, the practitioners sought to be like Jesus. In the last chapter I argued how this had become modelled on the incarnational framework adopted from Young Life. The weakness of this approach was established as being based on the ideas of observation, like and model. To construct a more faithful and authentic view of practice a move from seeing practice as being like Jesus to being 'in Christ', to participate in the communicative activity of God (Vanhoozer 2010) needs to be made. To do this, further considerations of both Moltmann's (1981) and Fiddes' (2000) ideas on participation need to be explored and then a more convincing argument as articulated by Vanhoozer (2010) is advanced.

In the description of *perichoretic* relationships found within Moltmann (1981), what the Trinity says about human relations is not exactly clear.⁸² Vanhoozer (2010, p.151-154) sees there are inherent problems with his idea of participation because of his near collapse of the immanent into economic. For Bauckham (1995, p.5), this collapsing of the immanent Trinity into the economic, found with Moltmann (1981), is forced because he interprets the Trinity through the cross.⁸³ Here, as Bauckham (1989, p.304) sees, Moltmann's interpretation of the cross is seen as the event of

⁸¹ Vanhoozer (2010, pp.167-169) is critical of the idea put forward by Fiddes (2000) that God 'self limits' himself, as he sees that if this is the case, then as Pannenberg (1994, p.16) observes, the creature is no longer dependant on God alone but on 'other powers'..

⁸² Tanner, (2004, p.324-325) argues that, for Moltmann (1988) the problem, here, revolves around a too greater focus on the so-called immanent Trinity.

⁸³ Gunton (1997, p.178-186) argues against Moltmann's (and also Jungel, von Balthasar and Barth) idea of the cross as the key to Trinitarian theology.

God suffering solidarity with the world.⁸⁴ This theme of suffering runs like a thread through the data and the youth ministry literature and becomes important as a normative Trinitarian move for youth ministry practice is sought, but to locate suffering within God, as Moltmann (1981) does, is deeply problematic. To make this theological move of God suffering solidarity with the world, Moltmann (1981) has to take three decisive turns in developing his Trinitarian doctrine of God. As Bauckham (1989, p.304) argues, firstly, as an event between the Father and the Son, God suffers the god-forsakenness that separates the Son from the Father and this required a Trinitarian language that emphasized the inter-subjective relationship between the divine persons as worked out through Moltmann's (1981) concept of *perichoresis*. Secondly, he developed the idea that God can suffer pain and be affected by his creation.

Vanhoozer (2010, p.163) is critical of this, seeing within *perichoretic* relational theism, as conceived in Moltmann (1981) and that echoes through Fiddes's (2000) thinking, in which creatures can affect God⁸⁵ as they themselves are influenced, then it is impossible to escape the conclusion that God's being and existence is constituted by his relations *ad extra*. This vulnerability raises classical concerns, for, if within this view, God can voluntarily relinquish his aseity, how does this preserve divine sovereignty and prevent God from becoming a victim whose goal for creation is at the risk of failure? For Vanhoozer (2010, p.163-165), this has implications for the Gospel, for the Gospel is only good news if it contains an assurance that all will indeed end well. The problem from a classical view is that within the doctrine of God, as presented by Moltmann (1981), God is less of a divine agent who can be at work, but is an empath who is voluntarily susceptible to others. This is because Moltmann's (1981) understanding of God's love is bound up with his creation. Yet, Aquinas sees that God's love is his willing the good (*ben + volere*) for others and salvation is 'the plan of God to communicate his own goodness'. The response of these 'others' is the goal of God's love and not an intrinsic element within it. Therefore, the cross becomes primarily about the love of God in the giving of Christ rather than receiving, as Vanhoozer (2010, p.165) argues.

⁸⁴ Written in the long dark shadows of Auschwitz, Moltmann wants nothing to do with the all-powerful God of Christian theism, here God is not sovereign, but becomes a fellow sufferer.

⁸⁵ This raises questions about the 'Open Theism' debate. This lies outside the scope of this chapter but the debate finds a proponent in John Piper and an advocate in Gregory Boyd.

The Third problem in Moltmann's (1981, p.6) thinking, as noted, is that he abandons the traditional distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity. For Moltmann, the cross becomes a Trinitarian 'event' between the Father, Son and Spirit, this gives us a Trinitarian history of God, in which the mutual involvement of God and the world is increasingly stressed. Moreover, God experiences a history with the world in which he both affects and is affected by the world and this becomes the history of God's own Trinitarian relationships. These relationships are bound up in *perichoretic* love with the world and this leaves Moltmann (1981, p.160), to *nearly* surrender the traditional distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity. This is because for Moltmann (1981), the difference between the immanent and economic is only necessary if we see God as either liberty or necessity. Here Moltmann (1981, p.151) argues that God's liberty is his love and God has to love the world as he loves himself.

Therefore, for Moltmann (1981, p.152), we discover this God through our love and through our perception, and what we perceive changes us to be like God. In Moltmann's (1981) framework, we can only know God through doxological participation.⁸⁶ However, as Torrance argues (1996, p.311), this weakness of the near collapse of the immanent into the economic Trinity, is because of Moltmann's (1981) struggle as to what takes precedence: God's divine freedom or his divine love. Because of this, he seems to adopt a form of *panentheism*, a point that Vanhoozer (2010, p.153) also sees, and therefore, fails to distinguish between God's time and created temporality.⁸⁷ Moreover, the result of this is that transcendence which is intrinsic to Moltmann's (1981, p.152) concept of doxology participation is undermined. As Torrance (1996, p.311) and Vanhoozer (2010, pp.162-163) see, this is because God's history is placed or cemented⁸⁸ into the process of human life and struggle. This failing to see God's participation in humanity as free *ekstasis* (apart from how God has his being and which is in no

⁸⁶ This, Moltmann (1981, p.152-153) calls *real* theology, knowledge of God that finds its expression in thanks and praise which is expressed because of our experience of salvation. Doxological theology becomes a responsive theology. Moltmann argues that the immanent Trinity becomes the counter, part of praise and the economic Trinity becomes the embodiment of history and salvation.

⁸⁷ For clarification on this A. Torrance (1996, p.312) cites Barth's discussion, 'The Eternity and Glory of God' (C.D.2.1) and especially 612-19.

⁸⁸ A. Torrance (1996, p.313) notes that it is Rahner who uses this phrase. Rahner notes that this cementing of the human struggle into God does not help him to escape from his mess and despair if God is in the same predicament.

sense arbitrary) means that Moltmann (1981) does not seem to appreciate that participation in God's intra-divine glory has to be described as humanity's participation in the transcendent Triune life as Torrance (1996, p.313) argues. Therefore, doxological participation becomes an event of grace,⁸⁹ an idea which Moltmann barely mentions, and not about any human response. The implications' of this, as Tanner (2004, p.327) contends, is that Moltmann (1981) does not have to explain what Trinitarian relationships would be like with human beings 'in' them. The Trinity appears as a dialogical fellowship of love and mutual service, the kind of Trinity that human beings could imitate and model, an idea that, Bauckham (1995, p.160), Kilby (2000) and Vanhoozer (2010) see is problematic and unconvincing.

As the Trinity is considered as a normative voice for practice in relation to the theme of like Jesus, we can begin to move away from the paradoxical ideas of participation *and* model held within Moltmann's thinking and consider another view of participation. As introduced above, this idea of participating in God finds resonance in Fiddes (2000) and Vanhoozer's (2010) thinking, but these ideas differ on their interpretation of what this means. For Fiddes (2000), we are drawn into the Trinitarian relationships in which God 'happens'. But, what does it mean to participate, to be swept up, into this event of relationships in which God 'happens'? Fiddes (2000, pp.279-280) develops these thoughts as he sees Christ as the divine Logos and through the incarnation, we are enabled to participate and, therefore, are drawn into the Triune relationship in God. Theologically this is worked out because, as Fiddes (2000, p.86) argues, if Christ is deeply immersed in the flow of relationship within God and the incarnation, then he becomes the point of access where humanity can enter and participate in the divine dance of the *perichoresis*. We are 'in Christ' and, therefore, we are summoned to participate in God who, with great humility, participates in our lives. To help articulate this, Fiddes (2000, p.37-38) argues that the New Testament describes prayer as being 'to' the Father 'through' the Son and 'in' the Spirit. This means that, as we pray to God as Father, we are fitting into a movement like that of speech between a son and father. This involves a movement and response of self-giving, like of a father sending forth a son, which the early theologians called eternal generation and which we experience in the

⁸⁹ Moltmann (1974, p.236) in arguing for the doctrine of the trinity in the cross, notes that even the doctrine of grace is monotheistic and not Trinitarian in practice.

mission of God in history, an idea that resonates and echoes in Vanhoozer's (2010, p.247) thinking.

For Fiddes (2000, pp.37-38), as we pray in this 'event', we find these movements of response and mission are interwoven by a third: Spirit. It is the Spirit, who disturbs, opens, deepens and provokes, and this leads Fiddes to see how people become playgrounds for the Spirit. The traditional formulation that the Spirit proceeds from the 'Father through the Son' points to a movement which renews all relations 'from' and 'to' the other. Through identifying the divine 'persons' as relations, Fiddes (2000) brings together a way of understanding the nature of *being* (ontology) with a way of *knowing* (epistemology). Therefore, the being of God is understood as an 'event' and relationship through an epistemology of participation and each only makes sense with the other. Thus, we cannot observe the Trinitarian God, as in Moltmann (1981), a being which is relationships; we can only know God through the mode of participation. Through the notion of *perichoresis* and 'subsistent relations'

Fiddes (2000) sees that God is wholly constituted by relationality and, as we have seen, Vanhoozer (2010, pp.139-177) and Kilby (2000) are critical of this new orthodoxy. However, this notion of participation requires further investigation. Fiddes (2000, p.34), develops his idea of *perichoretic* participation through his notion of 'subsistent relations' and through the analogy, of the *perichoresis* as being like a divine dance. Here, Fiddes (2000, pp.71-81), makes a counterintuitive move. This is because of how he develops 'persons as relations' through his thinking on the *hypostases*. Within this, Fiddes (2000, pp.81-93) concedes that there are objections to this idea. The participatory rather than observational language that is used within 'subsistent relations' means we have to face the criticism that, unless the divine persons are conceived as subjects and agents, they will lose their distinct identity (*hypostasis*). However, there are two core arguments against it; these revolve around identity and activity. Firstly, let us consider this idea of identity. Here there is a danger that the lack of diversity within God means the submerging of the persons into an all 'embracing dominance of oneness of substance'. This then is the objection that the 'relations' in God have no particular identity of their own.⁹⁰ Fiddes' (2000, p.83) counter argument to this is how can there be anything more distinct from each

⁹⁰ Gunton (1993, p.191) sees this and argues against, through his idea of substantiality.

other than a 'movement of relationship' like that from a father to a son (Father) and a movement like that from a son to a father (Son) and an opening up of these relationships to new depths and possibilities (Spirit) – but what exactly does 'movement of relationship' mean here and how exactly do they remain distinct?

For Fiddes (2000, p.83), this is worked out through and spoken about within the medium of participation and this leads us to concrete ways of speaking about the particular. Although this is helpful, it is not altogether convincing. Furthermore, it requires us to think at the level of Spirit. We can only participate – join in, with these 'movements of relationship', if we see our spirit connecting with God as Spirit. The second main objection is how can one think of a relationship as doing anything? This revolves around the idea of activity. Here, it could be said that 'actions' can only be ascribed to communicative agents involved in communicative activity as in Vanhoozer's (2010, p.245) thinking. This second idea of activity is tied into the first idea of identity. This is the part of Fiddes' (2000, p.85) argument that is so counterintuitive. This is partly because it is so hard for us to imagine a 'relation' as a 'person'. However, perhaps this is because of the construct of 'persons' that has developed in the received tradition of Plato and Aristotle, where to be a 'person' was to have particular attributes.⁹¹

For both Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000), the operative concept is participation, however, within both of these approaches, as they are conceived through the notion of *perichoresis*, they are both filled out with projected ideas about human relationality, as Kilby (2000) and Vanhoozer (2010) see. Again, the work of Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000) remain, an unconvincing move in terms of providing a normative voice in how Trinitarian theology can serve youth ministry practice as authentic and faithful in terms of this operant notion of participation. Therefore, a way of moving from being like Jesus, from the ideas of model and imitation, to being 'in Christ' through a more convincing Trinitarian theological framework of participation is needed. It is Vanhoozer (2010, p.289) who provides a different and more convincing argument for a move in this direction.

⁹¹ Cunningham (1998, p.165) also sees how these concepts can be misleading, since we usually assume that relations exist between things and that this tendency is compounded by the modern understanding of human persons as first and foremost as individuals.

In the narratives of practice the data demonstrated how the youth ministers enact mission amongst non-churched young people through being like Jesus. In the last chapter the limits of Christology were explored, seeing that the imitation of Christ is only part of the theological picture. Vanhoozer's (2010, p.289), thinking resonates with this, seeing that being 'in Christ' involves more than just following Christ's example. To explore theologically what this participating 'in Christ' is like, a more authentic and faithful expression of what re-imagined relationships as communicative acts and youth ministry practice can move to is required. Vanhoozer (2010, p. 279) sees that the challenge for communicative theism is how to specify how God remains God while allowing creatures to participate in his Triune life. Here he argues, that we need to distinguish between God's attributes (God's being *ad intra*) and his redemptive work (God's being *ad extra*). Therefore to participate 'in Christ', in the life of God, is to benefit from his words and acts in history, especially the history of Christ. It is seeing, as Vanhoozer (2010, p.283) argues, how the Father communicates new life in and through the Son, by the Spirit: it is 'in Christ' that there is a *new creation*.

The company of the saints partake in the divine nature – God's being-in-communicative activity, by being 'in Christ'. Communion with God through union with Christ is at the heart of the Gospel, the substance of faith and humanity's ultimate hope in life. Jesus is the *archegos* – the author of our salvation (Heb 2:10) whose main claim is that participating in God means participating in his Triune being-in-communicative-activity. Vanhoozer (2010, p.284) continues, 'in Christ', according to the apostle Paul, is used as a virtual shorthand for salvation. Therefore, being 'in Christ' becomes a central description of salvation as to the effect of the work of Christ. For Vanhoozer (2010, p.293) union with Christ – being 'in Christ', is a matter of *theodramatic* participation. Importantly, communicants do not become one with the divine essence, but participate in God's communicative action, in the economy of revelation and redemption, in God's mission in and to the world (Vanhoozer 2010 p.261). Therefore, to be 'in Christ' is to be in the thick of the Trinitarian action; to be 'in Christ' is to be constituted as a willing participant in the *theodrama*. Subsequently, for Vanhoozer (ibid, p.293), those who enjoy being 'in Christ' are not caught up in his essence or nature, as in the work of Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000), but are participants in the effects of his personal history – we

come to be remade in his *mythos* - in the plot of his history. To partake in the divine nature is to participate in the *theodrama* that is God's being-in-communicative activity through the Son's fellowship with the Father and the Spirit. Therefore, the economic Trinity communicates the immanent Trinity. The God who is with us, is the God who has perfect light, life and love in himself and it is as communicative agents in eternal relationship that Father, Son and Spirit engage in the economy of communication with the world.

In relation to youth ministry practice, this moves beyond the partial theological description, the theological shorthand of like Jesus, as expressed through the narratives of practice, and locates this in the richer theological description of being 'in Christ', that has the possibility to be enacted and performed through relationships as communicative acts. It resonates acutely with the expressions of this as connection and transmission and it locates these communicative acts not only in the Biblical *theodrama* but, more specifically, in the history of Christ's person. Moreover, the moving from like Jesus to being 'in Christ', through theological re-imagination of relationships as communicative acts becomes an enacted expression of *marturia*, the witnessing of the self-giving love of God in Christ. It is possible to begin to unravel this particular church practice from the collapsing into the expression of relationships discovered in the narratives of practice. Furthermore, the next theme of being there which in the data was the enacting of like Jesus can be explored.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Being There to Being There – 'In Christ'

As the data demonstrated, the third theme of being there is the enacted presence of the second, like Jesus; this becomes a performed theological moment in time and space, through which the youth ministers act as a 'symbol' (Tillich 1962). As a 'symbol', they embody qualities of that in which they participate, that which they point towards, however, as the data showed, this participation is not articulated - only the language of model is used and is seen as being like Jesus. Through theological re-imagination and relationships as communicative acts a richer definition of being there as 'symbol', can be seen. Building on the insights above the participative nature of this can be held in God's communicative action (Vanhoozer

2010). Moving from being there as ‘symbol’, as demonstrated in the enacted mission of the youth ministry practitioners, to being there – ‘in Christ’, thus locating this in the participative nature of ‘symbol’ (Tillich 1962).

Furthermore, through moving from being there to being there - ‘in Christ’, the *diakonia*, the service amongst suffering young people and the locating of this within the practice of the church becomes a litmus test for the normative voice of Trinitarian theology and youth ministry practice. Therefore, the move from seeing mission as no longer focused on the individual youth minister, to the locating of this in the *ecclesia* and the historic practice of the *koinonia* can be made. Within this, the historical practices of *diakonia* and *kerygma* can begin to be teased apart; again, helping to unravel the collapsing of practices into the concept of relationships that is expressed within the data.

As the investigations have shown, Fiddes (2000) explores how the Trinitarian God is ‘open to us’ through his doctrine of ‘subsistent relations’. Within this, Fiddes (2000, p.301) makes an important point that, within the threefold relations of God, Father, Son and Spirit, we need to take bodies as seriously as God does. This means paying particular attention to people as they actually are, paying attention to the particular.⁹² Fiddes (2000, p.301) argues, that we need to value people as images of God. As Fiddes (2000, p.296) develops his argument, he sees that God commits himself to bodies as a meeting place with us and, through this, his idea of walking sacrament⁹³ is outworked. What he means by this, is that the minister embodies and enacts the presence of God – becomes a sacrament in the sense that in his or her body is a place of encounter, an interface with the movements of God’s life of love. As Fiddes (2000, p.296) sees, ministers, therefore, do not just exercise a function, or fulfil a task, but there is a fusing between person and function, between doing and being. Here is not the promotion of the ideal Christian, but a walking sacrament who symbolises an ultimate value, who embodies an ideal without being an ideal, who participates in and throws open the doors to the divine *perichoretic* dance of God. In this, Fiddes (2000, p.282) is developing Tillich’s (1962) concept that as walking sacraments people are ‘symbols’ in the sense that they participate in the reality to

⁹² This theme of the ‘particular’ has resonance with Gunton’s (1993) work..

⁹³ Fiddes (2000, p.281) sees that the sacraments can become part of the ecstatic movements of love within God; moreover, they become access points into the ‘dance’ of the perichoresis within God.

which they point, an idea that finds acute resonance with this thesis. Therefore, in many ways this is an important move and, Fiddes' (2000) thinking, begins to move theology away from the abstract and into the lived. But this relationality as expressed in these terms is problematic. We can again see Kilby's (2000) and Vanhoozer's (2010) argument of projection being utilised to name what is not understood, especially around Fiddes (2000 p.296) concept of the 'divine *perichoretic* dance of God'. Furthermore, there are other challenges here due to the creator / creature and the God / world relationship that we have been discussing. For example, what exactly does it mean for our bodies to be a place of encounter and an interface with the movements of God's life of love – how does this work? In addition, there is again a collapsing into all things relational. In Fiddes' (2000, p.294) thinking, relationships become sacramental, therefore, at least in part, losing the distinctiveness of the traditional understanding of church sacraments and practices.

With this in mind, the data showed how important being there was in the ministry of the youth ministers, as they worked amongst non-churched young people in their joys and in their sufferings, and has a focus on orthopraxis. The stories of enacted mission amongst marginalised and suffering young people ring through the narratives of practice. It also echoes in the literature on youth ministry particularly through the work of Dean (2004), Root (2007), and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008). To consider a deeper description of relationships as communicative acts, and moving from being there to being there – 'in Christ', the issue of suffering highlights a number of issues. Although a full discussion of the divine impassibility debate lies outside of the scope of this chapter, the theme of suffering runs like a thread through Moltmann's (1974, 1981) thinking. The suffering of Jesus on the cross becomes the foundation of his doctrine of God. Moltmann (1981, p.101), therefore, interprets the cross as signifying the concept of death within God, here Moltmann views salvation in terms of God voluntarily accepting and absorbing pain, death and suffering in the world in to himself. Fiddes (2000, p.184) develops a similar view that, within the divine *perichoresis*, all three movements within God are involved in suffering. He differs from Moltmann (1981) by drawing on Balthasar's concept of 'distances' in God. Through this, Fiddes (2000, p.185) sees that these are spaces within the dance of *perichoresis*, spaces in the weaving currents of relational love and in these spaces

humanity can participate. Here God enters with empathy and identifies with the experience of suffering in the lives of humanity.

This is a powerful idea, and is born out because of Fiddes's (2000) concern to locate the Trinity within pastoral practice. Therefore, a theological move could be made through the work of Bonhoeffer (1960) to see how it is 'only the suffering God can help'. In the youth ministry literature, Root (2007) makes a similar move. Therefore, it would be possible to see how both Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000) could provide a normative voice in terms of Trinitarian theology and youth ministry practice that is authentic and faithful for relationships as communicative acts. Fiddes' (2000) thinking on walking sacrament could be pushed in terms of the youth minister being there and suffering alongside young people. This could be held up as a very attractive idea for complexities of practice, but at what theological cost? For within this thinking, held by Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000), Vanhoozer (2010, p.460) argues that by the near collapsing of the immanent into the economic Trinity, possibilities can come to define God only by what he suffers on and after the cross rather than by his free authorial communicative activity outside that history as well.

This raises two issues, the first, as Vanhoozer (2010, p.461) argues, in a canonical context, the cross, is not a symptom of God's general metaphysical relationship to the world, but the climax of God's particular relationship with Israel that began with a divine promise to Abraham. Therefore, only a canonical and covenantal *mythos* can hope to make sense of the God / world dynamics. Secondly, for Vanhoozer (2010, p.466), God is not the fellow sufferer who understands and suffers with us, as in Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000), for in this line of thinking suffering is normalised within God, but the sovereign sufferer who withstands, transforms and redeems suffering. This important point finds resonance in a number of converging themes in Paul's notion of sharing in - *koinonia*, Christ's sufferings. For Vanhoozer (2010, p.464), this is a *communion of passio*. The fellowship in Christ's sufferings is Paul's picture of the life of Christ. Therefore, to participate in God is to be caught up into the life of Christ and into the life of the Triune God. As described earlier, this is to participate in Jesus' history, to participate in this history is to participate in the covenantal history that serves as the framework for the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The covenant between Humanity and God finds its clearest expression in the picture of the church, the church is a community of communicants,

the company of those who 'in Christ' share in the Triune God's communicative action to the world. For Vanhoozer (2010, p.291), this communicative action is dialogical – this has an interrelation to and real resonance with the theme of relationships as communicative acts as connection and transmission.

The faith by which the Spirit unites us to Christ comes through the hearing and experience of the Word. In this, Jesus both speaks and is spoken about by the Father. Jesus engages in communicative action, yet, Jesus is also the Word of the Father. The Father utters the Word, the Son is who gets communicated – the content of the Father's speech, the Spirit is the channel that carries the Word. Dialogical union with Christ ushers communicants (us) into a triune conversation whereby God shares with us the relationship he has between the 'persons' of the Trinity. This resonates with Fiddes' (2000) thinking on being part of the speech between Father, Son and Spirit. In Vanhoozer's (2010, p.291) communicative framework, the Spirit incorporates the faithful communicants into the Son so they receive and respond to the diverse communicative acts that structure their relations to their covenant Lord. However, this relationship is asymmetric, as Jesus remains Lord, but there is also covenantal intimacy and friendship in communicating with God. However, within this dialogical friendship there is not the fusing of horizons, whereby one's individuality and name are absorbed into the Godhead, but a dialogical union in which Christ's voice leads our thinking and feeling. Therefore, to be 'in Christ' is not to lose one's identity, but find one's true identity through salvation. Here, through Jesus' agency and the Spirit's actions, we are drawn into the sphere of the new covenant and into the fellowship of his triune life. There is fellowship and not fusion, but this divine communicative action is the source and structuring principle of the new covenantal being in Christ. The outworking of this divine communicative action, which incorporates us, is the body of Christ.

The body of Christ corresponds most to God and his communicative action when its members pour out their lives for the sake of others in various kinds of communicative acts - *diakonia*, we could call this being there – 'in Christ' for others especially when they are suffering. This again resonates with Fiddes (2000) thinking, but is reframed through divine communicative action and human agency. For Vanhoozer (2010, p.289), what God communicates to suffering people (in our case young people) is the hope of an imperishable inheritance. Vanhoozer (2010, p.289)

argues that being ‘in Christ’ has an eschatological movement, it is to participate in his history (the already) and future (the not yet), it is to participate in his death and resurrection, to be a *new creation* to participate in a new Spirit empowered mode of existence. This *new creation* is the church and the people of God share in God’s communicative activity to and for the world. For Vanhoozer (2010, p.292), being ‘in Christ’ is not something that happens to isolated individuals, but to a company of people, the *ecclesia*. Union with Christ implies union with others and to be ‘in Christ’ implies a corporate existence and incorporation into Christ.

Within this, three interconnected moves can be identified. This can advance a more authentic and faithful expression of being there. Firstly, the location of the idea of the youth minister as ‘symbol’ into the theological expression of participating ‘in Christ’, moving beyond the limits of theological shorthand of imitation, like and model that is expressed in the data. Secondly, to understand that being there – ‘in Christ’ also includes the *koinonia*. This includes a turning away from an individualist understanding of youth ministry that echoed through the data and in the narratives of practice and also reverberates through the literature of Borgman (1997), Ward (1997), and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008). Thirdly being there – ‘in Christ’, contains two important elements. The traditional Christian practices of the *kerygma* and *diakonia* as communicative acts need to be made more explicit within youth ministry practice if it is to be more authentic and faithful to the Gospel. As the data showed, the youth ministers demonstrated multifaceted examples of *diakonia*, but this presence, this coming alongside young people as they suffer, in acts of serving and prior mission needs to be teased apart from being collapsed into this all encompassing idea of relationship, and needs to be re- rooted in the traditional practice of *koinonia*. Furthermore, there seemed a real reluctance to *speak* about the Gospel; there is very limited attention and witness paid to the *kerygma*. This is a point of challenge for contemporary youth ministry practice, to rediscover what it means to speak about God through relevant contextualised ways and story. Moreover, there is again real interrelation here with the themes of relationships as communicative acts as played out through the ideas of connection and transmission that is explored above and with the theme of time and journey as liminal space that is explored next.

Relationships as Communicative Acts: Time and Journey as Liminal Space

The data showed how this descriptive theme of time and journey is articulated through the practice of the youth ministers. This acts as theological shorthand for the multifaceted aspects of this embodied practice. It shines through the narratives of practice; it is both explicit and implied in the interrelated themes of being there and relationships as communicative acts through connection and transmission.

Relationships as communicative acts are carried over time and through this sense of journey. As the data demonstrated the youth ministers are aiming for this place of liminal space, this time of waiting for God to act. In the last chapter, the investigations show how this theme of time and journey resonated through the youth ministry literature, particularly in the work of Ward (1997), Green and Christian (1998) and Pimlott and Pimlott (2008).⁹⁴ In this section, I argue that this is not only a place of waiting for God to act, but also a liminal space for God's communicative action.

Subsequently, Vanhoozer (2010, p.320) sees that time is a space for communicative action and there is acute resonance here with the narratives of enacted practice. Vanhoozer argues that to be is to communicate and that eternity is a predicate of God's own life, the communication *ad intra* of God's light and love. God's time (eternity) is a form of God's communicative action, the way God lives, the mode of God's existence. Time, by contrast is the form and space of God's communicative action *ad extra*. Therefore, as eternity is the form of God's life, so time is the form of the human creature's life. Within this, time is not impersonal causation, but personal communication; this becomes a space for relational existence. As the data is reviewed, relationships as communicative acts and the liminal spaces created by them becomes the place of action through God's communicative acts to each of us. As Vanhoozer (2010, p.321) sees, the Biblical authors conceived time not as mere duration, but in terms of events that make a difference - time for deeds to be done (Eccl 3:2-8). Therefore, time provides us with opportunities to align ourselves with the created order as God acts and time opens up the possibility of interacting with others. Therefore to live is to have time for communicative action, to make a liminal space for God to act, to allow God to communicate through his Spirit. Time becomes

⁹⁴ For the issue of 'time' in youth ministry see Wiles (2000).

the medium and journey for interpersonal speaking and listening. As relationships as communicative acts through the theme of time and journey is considered, it becomes re-framed as the out-working of God's communicative action, a liminal space in which the youth ministers participate through being 'in Christ'. God becomes an agent in time but, as its author, is not limited by it. Eternity and sovereignty mark the ontological divide that distinguishes God from the world. Through time, God's communicative being as 'eternal' throws the creator/created relationship into sharp relief, rather than becoming blurred as in the work of Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000). The question is how?

As this is considered, a return to the operant issue of participation needs to be made. Through the analysis, the data showed how the youth ministers, as they enacted mission amongst non-churched young people, aimed for a liminal space a space that allowed God to work, a place of wrestling. As this is investigated, Vanhoozer (2010, p.281) argues that it is important to distinguish two kinds of being in or participation 'in Christ'. For Vanhoozer, this is advanced through a general cosmological participation in the Son through whom all things hold together and were made (Col. 1:16) and a more Christological abiding in the Son with whom there is reconciliation. Moltmann (1992, pp.39-42) also sees a similar division between the work in Creation through the Spirit as *Ruach* and in some of the particular occurrences and manifestations of God's Spirit in the Old Testament as *Shekinah*. This is the personal character of the Spirit and ties into Moltmann's (1974, 1981) theme of suffering, as he sees that it is the Spirit who suffers with those who suffer. However, for Moltmann (1992, p.39-42) the Spirit as *Shekinah* is not passive, but leads those who are suffering onward into a more life-giving future but, as observed, this is not worked out in convincing ways. Furthermore, Moltmann (1992, pp.58-65), draws together the Spirit of *Ruach* and *Shekinah* and unites them in the person of Christ.⁹⁵ For Moltmann (1992, pp.123-198), the Spirit is grounded in the resurrection of Christ and it is the Spirit of Christ that awakens us and emboldens us for justification.

Fiddes (2000, p.259) again follows Moltmann's (1992) theme in how the Spirit awakens in us a consciousness of Christ and alerts us to the Father, whom his Son is

⁹⁵ White (2013) also draws on Moltmann (1992) at this point.

representing. For Moltmann (1981), it is the Spirit that both glorifies the Father and the Son unifying them in glorification; this returns to the outworking of Moltmann's theology of the *perichoresis*. However, the central problem within Moltmann's (1981) thinking is that the unifying work of the Spirit in Creation affects the union of the Father and the Son. This becomes eschatological for the world and for God and problematic too, because the history of the world becomes united with God. Furthermore, Fiddes (2000, p.260) also adopts this line of thinking as creation is collapsed into the creator.

Yet, this theme of awakening echoes through the literature of youth ministry, particularly in Green and Christian (1998), Dean (2001), Ward (1997), Savage et al (2006) and Pimlott and Pimlott (2007), it also reverberates through the narratives of practice as relationships as communicative acts are embodied. Vanhoozer (2010, p.370) develops a similar theme, but seeks to keep the creator/created distinction that is in danger of being lost in the work of Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000). To do this he re-imagines time as a Trinitarian communicative act. As this notion of time is brought into play it echoes with a sense of journey and reverberates with the idea of a liminal space. Time, as noted above, becomes a particular sphere of communicative action and it is through a process of dialogical consummation that God acts not on persons, but within and through them. By acting through the Spirit's agency and grace, God brings people to their senses and makes them to be fully human, to be as they were always meant to be. Vanhoozer (2010, p.372) sees this as God speaking and calling to and through people. This calling is communicative and it opens people through their personhood, in a way that respects both God's sovereignty and human freedom.

Through Calvin, Vanhoozer (2010, p.372) sees these openings not only as the work of Grace, but through the activity and power of the Word and the Spirit. Through a communicative act which is not achieved by manipulating but by communicating, God calls us to participate in the light and life of his fellowship. It is a process of triune dialogics, as God brings about a change in people as they come to understand and come to see who he is. The Spirit is the world's empowering presence, the earthly presence and agent of the risen Christ (Rom 8:9, Phil 1:19). Here Vanhoozer (2010, pp.365, 372) sees that Christ empowers his disciples (us) to witness by the Spirit. This is a communicative act which liberates and brings understanding. The

Spirit liberates and sets people free to respond to the Father's voice, speaking of the beauty of Christ in a way that does not violate, but preserves, sanctions and sanctifies our created natures by the Creator. Vanhoozer (2010, p.281) argues that salvation, this coming to understand, this seeing, this awakening means relating covenantally to Christ, to be 'in Christ', means we participate in this Triune communicative act.

As the inferred theme of liminal space is considered, it becomes re-imagined not as a place of wrestling and waiting for God to act, but as a place of communicative action. Here, relationships as communicative acts come to the fore but, as noted through the interrelated theme of being there – 'in Christ', there needs to be a rediscovery of speaking of the *kerygma* that, as the data showed within the narratives of practice, had limited scope. For youth ministry, through relationships as communicative acts, to be authentic and faithful to the Gospel within these liminal spaces there needs to be a rethinking of how relationships have collapsed the traditional practices of the church. These can be re-imagined within a liminal space as communicative acts – relationships can still be at the centre, but reframed not only to the enacted *presence* of being there - 'in Christ' – the *diakonia*, but also to the *kerygma* – to the *witness* of speaking out, to the communicating of God's Word and action through the Spirit. Therefore, there needs to be *both* purposeful presence *and* wise contextual witness. There needs to be a theological re-imagining of the use of actions, words and story as divine communicative action.⁹⁶ In relation to this thesis, it is the faithful presence of the youth ministers being there alongside young people in the midst of their stories of marginalisation and suffering that resonates with the practice of *diakonia*, this focus on orthopraxis and right action needs to be affirmed.

Yet, to move this practice to be more authentic and faithful to the Gospel, it means youth ministry practice, through the traditional practices of *marturia*, *diakonia* and imaginative theological storytelling through the *kerygma* could, with great care and thought reframe this marginalisation and suffering, not through 'God as fellow sufferer', as in the work of Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000), however attractive this is, but to see that God withstands suffering and redeems, transforms and unmask its power, as Vanhoozer (2010, pp.446-449) argues. This requires

⁹⁶ This thought finds resonance in Cray's (2007) God's power was as much in action in the telling of parables as in the healing of the sick and this was subversive engagement with Israel's understanding of its story.

commanding compassion. Vanhoozer sees that divine passion is *kyriotic*; it is not commiserating but commanding, an *effectual compassion*. This does not only share, but transforms the sufferer's situation – it is *self moved*. This commanding compassion is *effectual*, because it is less of a passion than a power and it has the capacity to effect change and relieve suffering; divine compassion is an enabling power by which the Triune God shares and communicates his own life. This communicative act of God's covenantal concerns – his saving grace and goodness, provide comfort and transformation by placing suffering in a new perspective (Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17). Through being there – 'in Christ' and relationships as communicative acts the person of Jesus Christ can be made known through the *diakonia* and the *kerygma*, through purposeful presence and the wise contextual witness of the *koinonia*. Therefore, from the perspective of salvation, suffering may or may not be removed, but it can be reframed and re-orientated, to see and awaken the hope of an imperishable inheritance, providing the power to resist what can be resisted and the power to consent to that which cannot. Yet, within this, God's apparent inactivity is never a matter of indecision or impotence – but an expression of his constancy. God's patience is a form of his goodness, as he waits for people to respond to his communicative action through his expansive gift of time. It resonates with the theme of time and journey and of liminal space because the gift of time amidst suffering creates room for divine communicative action, a liminal space a space for bringing about a change of human perspective, a liminal space in which there is time and the journey for repentance and response, a liminal space that allows the communicative act of divine mercy.

A theologically imaginative move, so constructed, would complement some of the practices of enacted mission amongst young people. With this in mind, Vanhoozer (2010, pp.283, 495, 497), sees that we participate in God as we actively image and dramatize *theos* – yet it is ultimately the Spirit who recreates the image of God in us by efficaciously ministering the Word of God. The prime task of the Spirit is to communicate Christ, the Triune God freely decides to make what is his – his light, life and love – *ours* and then towards *others* who are yet to know him. This divine communicative action is ultimately orientated to communion; this is a divine/human fellowship that effects sanctification and the transformation of human communicants into the image of Jesus Christ. What God is ultimately authoring is a royal

priesthood and holy nation, a peaceable kingdom characterized by justice and rightness. This is a rich theological description of relationships as communicative acts which is held within the traditional practice of *marturia* but leads to a life of *doxologia* – praising and giving thanks to God in Christ.

It gives a rigorous, theological framework for the enacting of mission amongst non-churched young people.

It is now time to consider the implication of this thesis and draw the discussions to a conclusion.

CHAPTER FIVE:

LIVING NEW NARRATIVES OF PRACTICE

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the lived experience of youth ministry practitioners in their mission amongst non-churched young people. It has explored relationships as communicative acts. This has been through narratives of practice, as voiced by the youth ministry practitioners, through the voice of the literature on youth ministry as missionary endeavour and within Trinitarian theology as a normative voice in relation to practice.

The methodology adopted from Swinton and Mowat (2006) has set qualitative research in an appropriate cycle of reflection and within a practical theological hermeneutic. Relationships have been affirmed as an overarching theme expressed by the practitioners. These function as communicative acts, however, this multifaceted and nuanced practice is expressed through the terms relationship, like Jesus, being there and time and journey; this has been seen as theological shorthand.

The second theme of being like Jesus and the outworking of this as model, articulates how the youth minister practitioners enact mission amongst non-churched young people. This has been seen as only part of the theological picture, as the reality of Christological participation, of being 'in Christ' is not expressed. Furthermore, it has been argued that the third theme of being there is the enacted presence of the second, like Jesus. This again acts as theological shorthand for the complexities of practice and reveals a performed theology through which the youth ministers act as a 'symbol' (Tillich 1962). Yet the participative nature of this is not articulated, only the language of model is expressed and is seen as being like Jesus. Moreover, through being there, it has been argued that mission is primarily focused on the individual youth minister and is not explicitly expressed in regards to the congregation or wider church. Furthermore, there is a lack of ecclesiology that risks un-tethering the practice of youth ministry from the wider ecclesial frameworks and the richness of the Christian tradition of which youth ministry is a part.

Moreover, it has been argued that the creation of liminal spaces through time and journey is what the youth ministry practitioners have been seen to be aiming for in their enacting of mission amongst non-churched young people. The possibility of a liminal space, a place for encountering God, is summed up again as theological shorthand through the notion of time and journey. Yet, this liminal space is limited and constrained by the use of theological shorthand for relationships, like Jesus and being there. Therefore, this idea of theological shorthand is significant. It has been discovered that the practice of the practitioners evokes and reveals an embedded theology that fuels a way of life and service amongst young people. This way of life has a focus on right action (orthopraxis), on performing a function; it evokes and has a connection to a deeper set of 'right' beliefs (orthodoxy) from the Christian Tradition, yet this is not overtly expressed. Furthermore, it has been discovered that the emphasis on relationships as seen in the data, collapses the classic elements of the church's practices of *diakonia*, *kerygma* and *marturia* into the relational. This, as argued, turns relationships as communicative acts into a contemporary practice, but this is not intentional and is not reflected upon theologically.

Therefore, a more explicit and robust theological re-imagining of relationships as communicative acts has been advanced, locating this in God's divine authorship that is held within the divine communicative action. Here the practice of youth ministry is re-tethered into the richness of the Christian tradition. Moreover, it gives the youth ministers a more extensive theological expression that enables them to articulate their practice in deeper and richer terms. It articulates a rich grammar and description for practice. It gives a theological basis and framework for what youth ministers do and the activities in which they participate. The re-interpretation of relationships as communicative acts spells out and articulates a theology for youth ministry.

Furthermore, the traditional church practices of *marturia*, *diakonia* and *kerygma* that within the data are collapsed, have been explored and re-located in the ecclesial relationships of the *koinonia* that participate in God's divine communicative action. Moreover, it has been argued that lived practice can move from being a model of like Jesus to be re-imagined as Christological participation, being 'in Christ', again held within God's communicative act. Furthermore, through Trinitarian theology as communicative acts, a richer definition of being there as 'symbol' has been advanced. An argument has been made for how the participative nature of this can

be located in God's communicative action. Through this, a move from being there to being there – 'in Christ' has been progressed. In the moving from being there to being there – 'in Christ', the *diakonia*, the service amongst suffering young people and the location of this within the practice of the church has been seen as a litmus test for the normative voice of Trinitarian theology as it seeks to serve and critique youth ministry practice. Here, Trinitarian Theology as divine communicative action through the work of Vanhoozer (2010) has been seen as a more convincing argument than the Trinitarian theologies of Moltmann (1981) and Fiddes (2000). Moreover, it is has been seen that enacted mission should no longer be focused on the individual youth minister, but located in the ecclesial relationships of the *koinonia*. This is an acute point of challenge for contemporary youth ministry practice. Finally, through a theological re-imagining of relationships as communicative acts through the theme of time and journey as liminal space, it has been asserted how time is a space, not of waiting for God to act, but a place of God's communicative action. It has been argued that *both* purposeful presence and a rediscovery of wise contextual witness are needed; this is again, a point of challenge for contemporary youth ministry.

Implications and Recommendations for Renewed Practice

The implications of this thesis are that it brings the process of theological education, reflection and how youth ministers are trained into sharp focus. A key recommendation is that youth ministers should engage, learn, perhaps re-learn, navigate and practice the complex art of continuous theological reflection. Through the process of continuous theological reflection, either with the pastoral cycle (Ballard and Pritchard 2006) or as spiritual discipline and practice (Ward 2008), youth ministers could begin to articulate more emphatically why they do what they do from a theological perspective. Therefore, a summary of this research, its insights and themes could be presented to both Oasis College and CYM. Furthermore, the insights of this thesis will augment and contribute directly to my teaching of particular undergraduate and M.A. modules at Oasis College.⁹⁷ With this in mind, the following four recommendations are made:

⁹⁷ These include: Living the Christian Story, Practicing the Christian Story, Conceptual Frameworks and Underlying Values, Understanding, Working with Young People, Youth Ministry and the suite of The Bible in Christian Ministry modules.

Firstly, the insight that relationships function as communicative acts and the theological shorthand expression of this is crucial as it illuminates and critiques current youth ministry practice. The slowing down of the youth ministry process that this research has explored can be acted upon. As these insights are made known youth ministry practitioners will be able to see, name and begin to articulate the process of youth ministry and the current tensions within this. Therefore, this theological shorthand could be made clear. Once understood that the current practice of the youth ministers operates in this way then the process of working and enlarging the theological fragments of relationships, like Jesus, being there and time and journey could be expanded.

The second is for a greater exploration and understanding of the Biblical narrative, to move beyond the idea of plastic hermeneutics discussed in Chapter Three, and to wrestle with a greater exegetical and hermeneutical understanding of the text. Therefore, a recommendation is that the speaking about God, through the practice of *kerygma* within the midst of purposeful presence needs to be amplified and rediscovered. This requires youth ministers to go beyond the more familiar world of the New Testament story and to grapple with other parts of the Biblical narrative. Here, the presence of the youth ministry practitioners amongst the suffering of young people needs to be affirmed. Yet, this practice can also be an act of witness that goes beyond what is seen in the data, raising inquisitive questions amongst non-churched young people. These questions can lead to creative, contextual story-telling that challenges and unmask the contemporary narratives of the day. The discovery or re-discovery and the ability to theologically re-imagine the richness and scope of the Biblical narrative could bring aspects of the Christian story alive in the contemporary culture and context of non-churched young people. These could act as contextual points of connection and transmission for relationships as communicative acts that take place in the liminal spaces of God's communicative action.

Thirdly, is to excite, evoke and invite practitioners to explore the dramatic, imaginative landscapes of Christian doctrine. This is about expanding the theological depth and grammar of youth ministry. Within this thesis Trinitarian Theology acts in this way as the thesis has laid out a theology for youth ministry. Therefore, youth ministers need to be encouraged to engage in the wider theological disciplines of systematic and Biblical theology and move away from the shorthand descriptions of

practice to a discovery, connection and dialogue with the rich variety of work within these other important arenas. Furthermore, students could be encouraged to explore the work of the International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry and the Journal of Youth and Theology that enhances the grammar and theological depth of youth ministry and research within this discipline.

The fourth recommendation is to make explicit how youth ministry risks becoming un-tethered from ecclesiology and the wider Christian Tradition for as noted above, the youth ministry literature is the normative voice in relation to practice. This is a louder voice than the ecclesial tradition of which the youth ministers are a part. Therefore, the voice of tradition needs to be made more explicit within youth ministry training. Again, in the illumination of this tension it can begin to be addressed. Here, the distinctive elements of the practitioner's tradition, be it Anglican or Baptist, needs to be affirmed and these theological fragments enlarged. Again, it is about theological education and knowing the wider Christian story and its distinctive streams, not as ecclesial strait jackets but as the starting point for theological re-imagination and reflection in relation to practice.

Interrelated to the above points is how the original work and ideas within this thesis relates to the wider practice of youth ministry and its academic discussion. Here, recommendations are made for helping to make explicit the theology of youth ministry that is seen within relationships as commutative acts that take place within the divine communicative action and the critique of youth ministry as theological shorthand. To begin to circulate the ideas within this thesis the recommendations are that this happens at both an academic level and a popular level. The sharing of these ideas at an academic level is underway through papers at both the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Symposium in Durham (2013, 2014) and at the International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry European Conference in the Czech Republic (2014). In addition, an article on 'Youth Ministry and Theological Shorthand' for 'Práxeis' the new online Journal of CYM has been published and an extended article on a similar theme is being prepared for the Journal of Youth and Theology.

At a popular level, a chapter is under development for a book that explores the nature of contemporary youth work. The chapter has a focus on youth work and the church,

and will develop the notion of theology of relationships as communicative acts that Chapter Four has explored. In addition to this, an article for Youthwork magazine and a Grove booklet could be put together. This would begin to raise the issues that this thesis explores. In particular, it could highlight and make explicit the idea of theological shorthand and the implications for current youth ministry practice in terms of the opportunities to see God's Spirit at work and to join with God's communicative action and how this is not given enough consideration due to the theological shorthand expression and understanding of the Christian tradition and the Biblical narrative explored above.

My hope for the outcomes of this research is that it will lead youth ministers to recognise the richness that is held within relationships, that these relationships function as places of God's communicative action and liminal spaces that allow time for God to move and act in the lives of young people who do not yet know him, a liminal space that creates time, space and opportunities for youth ministers to discover, re-discovery and re-imagine the telling of the Biblical narrative and wider Christian tradition and story in their mission amongst non-churched young people. The discovery that this mission takes place in the divine communicative action of the Triune God of love is crucial for the contemporary practice of youth ministry and the academic discourse that circulates around this.

APPENDIX A:

Interview Summary

Date, Time and Length	Data Ref:	Initial reflections	Place	Environmental considerations
01/06/2012 Time:10.00 Length of interview: 32mins	‘D’	Very good pilot interview. The interview schedule and questions worked very well. Participant answered questions and told stories with ease. Excellent rapport.	Interviewers office	No environmental difficulties
11/ 07/2012 Time:11.30 Length of interview: 45mins - with 2 minute interruption	‘A’	Very good interview. The interview schedule and questions worked very well. Participant answered questions and told stories with ease. (phone call interrupted a story, but this was. recapped and then continued) Very good rapport.	Participants office	Interruptions from mobile phone - (not transcribed)
19/08/12 Time: 15.30 Length of interview: 37mins	‘M’	Very good interview. The interview schedule and questions worked very well. Participant answered questions and told stories with ease. Good rapport.	Teaching room at Oasis College.	No environmental difficulties
21/09/2012 Time: 11.00 Length of interview: 39mins	‘T’	Excellent interview. The interview schedule and questions worked very well. Participant answered questions and told stories with confidence. Clarification needed on theology and enacting. Good rapport	Participants Office	No environmental difficulties

Date, Time and Length	Data Ref:	Initial reflections	Place	Environmental considerations
<p>27/09/2012</p> <p>Time: 12.00</p> <p>Length of interview: 32mins and 8mins</p>	'R'	<p>Good interview. The interview schedule and questions worked very well. Participant answered questions and told stories with ease (despite interruptions). Challenging issues brought up about when relationships 'finish' with young people. Led to interview data being 'sparse' in one story. Interview finished and then participant told another story that was then recorded. Good rapport.</p>	Participants Office	<p>Two interruptions, as participant needed to open a door. Small kitten on participants lap during interview!</p> <p>.</p>
<p>28/09/2012</p> <p>Time: 10.00</p> <p>Length of interview: 35mins</p>	'J'	<p>Good interview. The interview schedule and questions worked very well. Participant answered questions and told stories with ease. A few prompts and clarification needed. Fair rapport.</p>	Interviewer's office at Oasis College.	<p>No environmental difficulties</p>

APPENDIX B:

Interview Schedule

I. Opening

- A. (**Establish Rapport**) [shake hands] Introductions. . .
- B. (**Purpose**) I would like to ask you some questions about your mission amongst non churched young people. It would be great to hear some stories of how you have worked amongst young people.
- C. (**Reason**) I hope to investigate the stories you tell and those of other youth ministers, to see how youth ministers enact mission amongst those young people who are not involved in church. It is part of a DTh Min research project (explain more if necessary).
- D. (**Clarification**) Do you have any questions about this or the participation sheet and your involvement in the project?
- E. (**Time**) The interview should take about 30 minutes, is this o.k.?

(**Transition:** Let me begin by asking you some questions . . .)

II Body

- A. (**introduction**) Could you tell me about your work with young people, what you do, the projects you run?
- B. (**transition**) Could you tell me stories of your experiences of mission with young people. . .
- C. Clarification / prompt (if needed)
- D. (prompt if needed) Could you tell me any more stories or expand on your experiences of mission amongst young people. . .
- E. Clarification / prompt (if needed and return to point D, if needed)

(**Transition:** Thank you for this, it is very interesting and helpful, it is great to hear your stories and of your work amongst young people..)

III Closing

- A. (**Summary and next steps**) The next step is to have the interviews transcribed. If you would like to see a copy of the thesis when it is finished, you are very welcome.
- B. (**Ending**) Thanks again, I appreciate your time and wish you well in all your work amongst young people.

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